G Wood

FROM THE LIBRARY OF

REV. LOUIS FITZGERALD BENSON, D. D.

BEQUEATHED BY HIM TO

THE LIBRARY OF

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SCC
.9370
V.2

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
NOV 23 1937
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE

WORKS

OF

WILLIAM MASON, M. A.

PRECENTOR OF YORK, AND RECTOR OF ASTON.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, STRAND;

BY W. BULMER AND CO. CLEVELAND-ROW, ST. JAMES'S.

1811.

THE

WORKS

OF

WILLIAM MASON, M. A.

VOL. II.

CONTAINING

ELFRIDA. CARACTACUS. LETTERS ON THE DRAMA.
ARGENTILE AND CURAN. SAPPHO. PIGMALION.

CONTENTS

OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

ELFRIDA - - - - - Page 1
Caractacus - - - - - 77
Letters relative to Elfrida - - - - 175
Illustrations of Caractacus - - - 195
Argentile and Curan - - - - 207
Sappho - - - - - - 319
Pigmalion - - - - - 363

ERRATA.

Page 8, line 11, for *nigh* read *night.*
12, — 9, after *favour* add a semicolon.
118, — 15, for *range* read *rang.*
121, — 3, for *istrusting* read *mistrusting.*
128, — 3, for *of sorrow* read *for sorrow*, and add a semicolon after it.
136, — 4, for *peace-meal* read *piece-meal.*
145, — 11, at the end of the line after *that* add a semicolon
184, — 17, read *single.*
223, last line but two, between *scruples* and *Dave*, add a comma.
351, line 2, after *divine* add !

ELFRIDA;

WRITTEN ON THE MODEL

OF THE

ANCIENT GREEK TRAGEDY.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE YEAR 1751.

THE ARGUMENT.

EDGAR, King of England, having heard the beauty of ELFRIDA, daughter of ORGAR Earl of Devonshire, highly celebrated, sent his favourite Minister ATHELWOLD to the father's castle, to discover whether she was really so beautiful, as fame reported her to be; and if she was, to offer her his Crown in marriage. ATHELWOLD, on seeing her, fell violently in love with her himself; and married her; conveying her soon after to his own castle in Harewood Forest, where he visited her by stealth from court; and in his absence left her with a train of British Virgins, who form the CHORUS. After three months, ORGAR, disapproving this confinement of his daughter, came disguised to Harewood to discover the cause of it. His arrival opens the Drama. The incidents which are produced by ATHELWOLD's return from court (who was absent when ORGAR came to his castle), and afterwards by the unexpected visit of the king, form the EPISODE of the Tragedy; the feigned pardon of ATHELWOLD, drawn from the king by the earnest intercession of ELFRIDA, brings on the PERIPETIA, or change of fortune; and the single combat between the king and ATHELWOLD, in which the latter is slain, occasions ELFRIDA to take the vow, which completes the CATASTROPHE.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ORGAR, Earl of Devonshire.

CHORUS, of British Virgins.

ELFRIDA, Daughter to ORGAR.

ATHELWOLD, Husband to ELFRIDA.

EDWIN, a Messenger.

EDGAR, King of England.

ORGAR, disguised in a Peasant's habit, speaks the Prologue.

SCENE, a Lawn before ATHELWOLD's Castle in *Harewood Forest.*

ELFRIDA;

A

DRAMATIC POEM.

ORGAR.

How nobly does this venerable wood,
Gilt with the glories of the orient sun,
Embosom yon fair mansion! The soft air
Salutes me with most cool and temp'rate breath;
And, as I tread, the flow'r-besprinkled lawn
Sends up a gale of fragrance. I should guess,
If e'er Content deign'd visit mortal clime,
This was her place of dearest residence.
Grant Heav'n! I find it such. 'Tis now three months,
Since first Earl ATHELWOLD espous'd my daughter.
He then besought me, for some little space
The nuptials might be secret; many reasons,
He said, induc'd to this: I made no pause,
But, resting on his prudence, to his will
Gave absolute concurrence. Soon as married,
He to this secret seat convey'd ELFRIDA;
Convey'd her as by stealth, enjoy'd, and left her:
Yet not without I know not what excuse

Of call to court, of EDGAR's royal friendship,
And England's welfare. To his prince he went
And since, as by intelligence I gather,
He oft returns to this his cloister'd wife;
But ever with a privacy most studied;
Borrowing disguises till inventive art
Can scarce supply him with variety.
His visits, as they're stol'n, are also short;
Seldom beyond the circuit of one sun;
Then back to court, while she his absence mourns
Full many a lonely hour. I brook not this.
Had ATHELWOLD espous'd some base-born peasant,
This usage had been apt: but when he took
My daughter to his arms, he took a virgin,
Through whose rich veins the blood of British kings
Ran in unsullied stream. Her lineage sure
Might give her place and notice with the noblest
In EDGAR's court. ELFRIDA's beauty too
(I speak not from a father's foolish fondness)
Would shine amid the fairest, and reflect
No vulgar glory on that beauty's master.
This act bespeaks the madman. Who, that own'd
An em'rald, jasper, or rich chrysolite,
Would hide its lustre, or not bid it blaze
Conspicuous on his brow? Haply ATHELWOLD
May have espous'd some other. 'Sdeath! he durst not.
My former feats in arms must have inform'd him,
That ORGAR, while he liv'd, would never prove

A traitor to his honour. If he has——
This aged arm is not so much unstrung
By slack'ning years, but just revenge will brace it.
And, by yon awful heav'n—But hold, my rage.
I came to search into this matter coolly.
Hence, to conceal the father and the earl,
This pilgrim's staff, and scrip, and all these marks
Of vagrant poverty.

CHORUS *(within.)*

Hail to thy living light,
Ambrosial Morn! all hail thy roseate ray!

ORGAR.

But hark, the sound of sweetest minstrelsy
Breaks on mine ear. The females, I suppose,
Whom ATHELWOLD has left my child's attendants;
That, when she wails the absence of her lord,
Their lenient airs, and sprightly-fancied songs,
May steal away her woes. See, they approach:
This grove shall shroud me till they cease their strain;
Then I'll address them with some feigned tale.

[*He retires.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. 1.

Hail to thy living light,
Ambrosial Morn! all hail thy roseate ray:
That bids young Nature all her charms display
In varied beauty bright;

That bids each dewy-spangled flow'ret rise,
And dart around its vermil dies;
Bids silver lustre grace yon sparkling tide,
That winding warbles down the mountain's side.

I. 2.

Away, ye Goblins all,
Wont the bewilder'd traveller to daunt;
Whose vagrant feet have trac'd your secret haunt
Beside some lonely wall,
Or shatter'd ruin of a moss-grown tow'r,
Where, at pale midnight's stillest hour,
Through each rough chink the solemn orb of nigh
Pours momentary gleams of trembling light.

I. 3.

Away, ye Elves, away:
Shrink at ambrosial Morning's living ray;
That living ray, whose pow'r benign
Unfolds the scene of glory to our eye,
Where, thron'd in artless majesty,
The cherub Beauty sits on Nature's rustic shrine.—

CHORUS, ORGAR.

CHORUS.

Silence, my sisters. Whence this rudeness, stranger,
That thus has prompted thine unbidden ear
To listen to our strains?

ORGAR.

Your pardon, Virgins:
I meant not rudeness, though I dar'd to listen;
For ah! what ear so fortify'd and barr'd
Against the force of powerful harmony,
But would with transport to such sweet assailants
Surrender its attention? Never yet
Have I pass'd by the night-bird's fav'rite spray,
What time she pours her wild and artless song,
Without attentive pause and silent rapture:
How could I then, with savage disregard,
Hear voices tun'd by nature sweet as her's,
Grac'd with all art's addition?

CHORUS.

Thy mean garb,
And this thy courtly phrase but ill accord.
Whence, and what art thou, stranger?

ORGAR.

Virgins, know
These limbs have oft been wrapt in richer vest:
But what avails it now? all have their fate;
And mine has been most wretched.

CHORUS.

May we ask
What cruel cause——

ORGAR.

No! let this hapless breast
Still hide the melancholy tale.

CHORUS.

We know,
There oft is found an avarice in grief;
And the wan eye of Sorrow loves to gaze
Upon its secret hoard of treasur'd woes
In pining solitude. Perhaps thy mind
Takes the same pensive cast: if not, permit
That we, in social sympathy, may drop
The tender tear.

ORGAR.

Ah! ill would it become ye,
To let the woes of such a wretch as I am,
E'er dim your bright eyes with a pitying tear.

CHORUS.

The eye, that will not weep another's sorrow,
Should boast no gentler brightness than the glare,
That reddens in the eye-ball of the wolf.
Let us intreat——

ORGAR.

Know, Virgins, I was born
To ample property of lands and flocks,
On this side Tweeda's stream. My youth and vigour
Achiev'd full many a feat of martial prowess:
Nor was my skill in chivalry unnoted
In the fair volume of my sovereign's love;
Who ever held me in his best esteem,
And closest to his person. When he paid,
What all must pay, to fate; and short-liv'd Edwy

Mounted the vacant throne, which now his brother
Fills (as loud fame reports) right royally;
I then, unfit for pageantry and courts,
Sat down in peace among my faithful vassals,
At my paternal seat. But ah! not long
Had I enjoy'd the sweets of that recess,
Ere by the savage inroads of base hinds,
That sallied frequent from the Scottish heights,
My lands were all laid waste, my people murder'd;
And I, through impotence of age unfit
To quell their brutal rage, was forc'd to drag
My mis'ries through the land, a friendless wand'rer.

CHORUS.

We pity and condole thy wretched state,
But we can do no more; which, on thy part,
Claims just returns of pity: for whose lot
Demands it more than theirs, whom fate forbids
To taste the joys of courteous charity;
To wipe the trickling tears, which dew the cheek
Of palsied age; to smooth its furrow'd brow,
And pay its gray hairs each due reverence?
Yet such delight we are forbid to taste!
For 'tis our lord's command, that not a stranger,
However high or lowly his degree,
Have entrance at these gates.

ORGAR.

Who may this tyrant—

CHORUS.

Alas! no tyrant he; the more our wonder
At this harsh mandate: tenderness and pity
Have made his breast their home. He is a man
More apt, through inborn gentleness, to err
In giving mercy's tide too free a course,
Than with a thrifty and illiberal hand
To stint its channel. This his praise you'll hear
The universal theme in EDGAR's court:
For EDGAR ranks him first in his high favour
Loads him with honours, which the Earl receives,
As does the golden censer frankincense,
Only to spread a sacred gale of blessings
Around on all.

ORGAR.

Methinks, this pleasing portrait
Bears strong resemblance of Lord ATHELWOLD.

CHORUS.

Himself: no Briton but has heard his fame.

ORGAR.

'Tis wond'rous strange; can you conceive no cause
For this his conduct?

CHORUS.

None, that we may trust.

ORGAR.

Your garbs bespeak you for the fair attendants
Of some illustrious dame, the wife, or sister
Of this dread Earl.

CHORUS.

On this head too, old man,
We are commanded a religious silence;
Which strictly we obey: for well we know
Fidelity's a virtue that ennobles
Ev'n servitude itself: Farewell, depart
With our best wishes; we do trespass much
To hold this open converse with a stranger.

ORGAR.

Stay, Virgins, stay; have ye no friendly shed,
But bord'ring on your castle, where these limbs
Might lay their load of mis'ry for an hour?
Have ye no food, however mean and homely,
Wherewith I might support declining nature?
Ev'n while I speak, I find my spirits fail;
And well, full well, I know, these trembling feet,
Ere I can pace a hundred steps, will sink
Beneath their wretched burthen.

CHORUS.

Piteous sight!
What shall we do, my sisters? To admit
This man beneath the roof, would be to scorn
The Earl's strict interdict; and yet my heart
Bleeds to behold that white, old, rev'rend head
Bow'd with such misery.—Yes, we must aid him.
Hie thee, poor Pilgrim, to yon neighb'ring bow'r,
O'er which an old oak spreads his awful arm,
Mantled in brownest foliage, and beneath

The ivy, gadding from th' untwisted stem,
Curtains each verdant side. There thou may'st rest;
There too, perchance, some of our sisterhood
May bring thee speedy sustenance.

ORGAR.

Kind Heav'n
Reward———

CHORUS.

Good Pilgrim, stay not here to thank us,
But haste to give thine age this meet repose.
That done, we do conjure thee leave the place
With cautious secresy; for was it known,
That thus we trespass'd on our lord's command,
The consequence were fatal.

ORGAR.

Fairest Maid!
Think not I'll basely draw down punishments
On my preservers. I retire. May blessings
Show'r'd from yon fount of Bliss repay your kindness.

[*Exit Orgar.*

SEMICHORUS.

Yes, sisters, yes, when pale distress
Implores your aiding hand,
Let not a partial faithfulness,
Let not a mortal's vain command
Urge you to break th' unalterable laws
Of heav'n-descended Charity.
Ah! follow still the soft-ey'd Deity;

For know, each path she draws
Along the plain of life,
Meets at the central dome of heart-felt joy.
Follow the soft-ey'd Deity;
She bids ye, as ye hope for blessings, bless.
Aid then the gen'ral cause of gen'ral happiness.

SEMICHORUS.

Humanity, thy awful strain
Shall ever greet our ear,
Sonorous, sweet, and clear.
And as amid the sprightly-swelling train
Of dulcet notes, that breathe
From flute or lyre,
The deep base rolls its manly melody,
Guiding the tuneful choir;
So thou, Humanity, shalt lead along
Th' accordant passions in their moral song,
And give our mental concert truest harmony.

CHORUS.

But see, ELFRIDA comes.
Should we again resume our former strain,
And hail the Morn that paints her waking beauties;
Or stay her gentle bidding? Rather stay;
For, as I think, she seems in pensive mood;
And there are times, when to the sorrowing soul
Ev'n harmony is harshness.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

Oh, my Virgins,
With what a leaden and retarding weight
Does Expectation load the wing of Time?
Alas, how have these three dull hours crept on,
Since first the crimson mantle of the morn
Skirted yon gay horizon? Say, my friends,
Have I miscounted? Did not ATHELWOLD
At parting fix this morn for his return?
This dear, long-wish'd-for morn? He did, he did,
And seal'd it with a kiss; I could not err.
And yet he comes not. He was wont outstrip
The sun's most early speed, and make its rising
To me unwish'd and needless. This delay
Creates strange doubts and scruples in my breast.
Courts throng with beauties, and my ATHELWOLD
Has a soft, susceptible heart, as prone
To yield its love to ev'ry sparkling eye,
As is the musk-rose to dispense its fragrance
To ev'ry whisp'ring breeze; perhaps he's false,
Perhaps ELFRIDA's wretched.

CHORUS.

See, ELFRIDA,
Ah see! how round yon branching elm the ivy
Clasps its green folds, and poisons what supports it.
Not less injurious to the shoots of Love
Is sickly jealousy.

ELFRIDA.

My mind nor pines
With jealousy, nor rests secure in peace.
Who loves, must fear; and sure who loves like me,
Must greatly fear.

CHORUS.

Yet whence the cause? Your Earl
Has ever yet (this little breach excepted)
Been punctual to appointment. Did his eye
Glow with less ardent passion when he left you,
Than at the first blest meeting? No! I mark'd him,
His parting glance was that of fervent love,
And constancy unalter'd. Do not fear him.

ELFRIDA.

I should not fear him, were his present stay
The only cause. Alas, it is not so!
Why comes my Earl so secret to these arms?
Why, but because he dreads the just reproach
Of some deluded fair one! Why am I
Here shrouded up, like the pale votarist,
Who knows no visitant, save the lone owl,
That nightly leaves his ivy-shrouded cell,
And sails on slow wing through the cloister'd isles,
List'ning her saintly orisons? Why am I
Deny'd to follow my departed lord,
Whene'er his duty calls him to the palace?

CHORUS.

Covet not that; the noblest proof of love

That ATHELWOLD can give, is still to guard
Your beauties from the blast of courtly gales.
The crimson blush of virgin modesty,
The delicate soft tints of innocence
There all fly off, and leave no boast behind
But well-rang'd, faded features. Ah, ELFRIDA,
Should you be doom'd, which happier fate forbid!
To drag your hours through all that nauseous scene
Of pageantry and vice! your purer breast,
True to its virtuous relish, soon would heave
A fervent sigh for innocence and Harewood.

ELFRIDA.

You much mistake me, Virgins; the throng'd palace
Were undesir'd by me, did not that palace
Detain my ATHELWOLD. If he were here,
His presence would convert this range of oaks
To stately columns; these gay-liv'ried flow'rs
To troops of gallant ladies; and yon deer,
That jut their antlers forth in sportive fray,
To armed knights at joust or tournament.
If ATHELWOLD dwelt here; if no ambition
Could lure his steps from love, and this still forest;
If I might never moan his time of absence,
Longer than that which serv'd him for the chase
Or of the wolf, or stag; or when he bore
The hood-wink'd falcon forth; might these, my Virgins,
And these alone, be love's short intervals,
I should not have one thought remote from Harewood.

CHORUS.

And would you wish that ATHELWOLD should slight
The weal of England, and on these light toys
Waste his unvalued hours? No, fond ELFRIDA;
His active soul is wing'd for nobler flights.

ELFRIDA.

What then, must England's welfare hold my Earl
For ever from these shades?

CHORUS.

We say not that.
The youth, who bathes in pleasure's tempting stream
At well judg'd intervals, feels all his soul
Nerv'd with recruited strength; but if too oft
He swims in sportive mazes through the flood,
It chills his languid virtue. For this cause
Your Earl forbids, that these enchanting groves,
And their fair mistress should possess him wholly.
He knows he has a country and a king,
That claim his first attention; yet be sure,
'Twill not be long, ere his unbending mind
Shall lose in sweet oblivion ev'ry care,
Among th' embow'ring shades that veil ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA.

Oh be that speech prophetic; may he soon
Seek these embow'ring shades! Meanwhile, my friends,
Sooth me with harmony. I know full well
That ye were nurs'd in Cornwall's wizard caves,
And oft have pac'd the fairy-peopled vales

Of Devon, where posterity retains
Some vein of that old minstrelsy, which breath'd
Through each time-honour'd grove of British oak.
There, where the spreading consecrated boughs
Fed the sage misletoe, the holy Druids
Lay rapt in moral musings; while the Bards
Call'd from their solemn harps such lofty airs,
As drew down Fancy from the realms of light
To paint some radiant vision on their minds,
Of high mysterious import. But on me
Such strains sublime were wasted: I but ask
A sprightly song to speed the lazy flight
Of these dull hours. And music sure can find
A magic spell to make them skim their round,
Swift as the swallow circles. Try its power:
While I, from yonder hillock, watch his coming.

[*Exit Elfrida.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. 1.

The turtle tells her plaintive tale,
Sequester'd in some shadowy vale;
The lark in radiant ether floats,
And swells his wild extatic notes:
Meanwhile on yonder hawthorn spray
The linnet wakes her temp'rate lay;
She haunts no solitary shade,
She flutters o'er no sun-shine mead,

No love-lorn griefs depress her song,
No raptures lift it loudly high,
But soft she trills, amid th' aerial throng,
Smooth simple strains of sob'rest harmony.

I. 2.

Sweet bird! like thine our lay shall flow,
Nor gaily brisk, nor sadly slow;
For to thy note sedate, and clear,
CONTENT still lends a list'ning ear.
Reclin'd this mossy bank along,
Oft has she heard thy careless song:
Why hears not now? What fairer grove
From Harewood lures her devious love?
What fairer grove than Harewood knows
More woodland walks, more fragrant gales,
More shadowy bowers, inviting soft repose,
More streams slow-wand'ring thro' her winding vales?

I. 3.

Perhaps to some lone cave the rover flies,
Where lull'd in pious peace the hermit lies.
For, from the hall's tumultuous state,
Where banners wave with blazon'd gold,
There will the meek-ey'd matron oft retreat,
And with the solemn sage high converse hold.

II. 1.

There, goddess, on the shaggy mound,
Where tumbling torrents roar around,
Where pendant mountains o'er your head
Stretch their reverential shade,
You listen, while the holy Seer
Slowly chants his vespers clear;
Or of his sparing mess partake,
The sav'ry pulse, the wheaten cake,
The bev'rage cool of limpid rill.
Then, rising light, your host you bless,
And o'er his saintly temples bland distil
Seraphic day-dreams of heav'n's happiness.

II. 2.

Where'er thou art, enchanting Power,
Thou soon wilt smile in Harewood's bower:
Soon will thy fairy feet be seen,
Printing this dew-impearled green;
Soon shall we mark thy gestures meek,
Thy glitt'ring eye and dimpled cheek,
Among the welcome guests that move
Attendant on the state of Love.
There, when the Sov'reign leads along
Of sports and smiles a jocund train,
Then last but loveliest of the lovely throng,
Thou com'st to soften, yet secure his reign.

II. 3.

And, hark, completing our prophetic lay,
The fleet hoof rattles o'er the flinty way;
Now nearer, and now nearer sounds.
Avaunt! ye vain, delusive fears.
Hark! Echo tells through Harewood's amplest bounds,
That Love, Content, and ATHELWOLD appears.

ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Look ever thus; with that bright glance of joy
Thus always meet my transports. Let these arms
Thus ever fold me; and this cheek, that blooms
With all health's op'ning roses, press my lips,
Warm as at this blest moment.

ELFRIDA.

ATHELWOLD,
I had prepar'd me many a stern rebuke;
Had arm'd my brow with frowns, and taught my eye
Th' averted glance of coldness, which might best
Greet such a loit'ring lover: but I find,
'Twas a vain task; for this my truant heart
Forgets each lesson, which resentment taught,
And in thy sight knows only to be happy.

ATHELWOLD.

My best ELFRIDA—Heav'ns! it cannot last.
The giddy height of joy, to which I'm lifted,
Is as a hanging rock, at whose low foot

The black and beating surge of infamy
Rolls ready to receive, and sink my soul.

ELFRIDA.

So soon to fall into this musing mood—
I thought, my Lord, you promis'd you would leave
These looks behind at Court. Nay, 'twas the cause
Assign'd for this my residence at Harewood,
That you might never come to these fond arms,
But with a breast devoid of public care,
And fill'd alone with rapture and ELFRIDA.
Said you not so? Why then that pensive posture,
That down-cast eye? Surely the City's din,
And this calm grove have lost their difference.
I'll with you to the palace.

ATHELWOLD.

Heav'n forbid!

ELFRIDA.

Nay, my best Lord, I meant it but in sport;
For should you bid me quit these blooming lawns,
For some bare heath, or drear unpeopled desert;
Believe me, I would think its wildness Eden,
If ATHELWOLD with frequent visitation
Endear'd the savage scene; but yet I fear
My Father.

ATHELWOLD.

Hah! why him?

ELFRIDA.

You know his temper;
How jealous of his rank, and his trac'd lineage
From royal ancestry. I fear me much,
He will not brook you should conceal me long
In this lone privacy: No, he will deem it
Far unbecoming her, whose veins are fill'd
With the rich stream of his nobility.
Should it be so, his hot and fiery nature,
I doubt, will blaze, and do some dreadful outrage.

ATHELWOLD.

He need not know it, or, if chance he should,
It matters not, if so this forest life
Seem of your own adoption and free choice.
And that it will so seem, I trust that love,
Which ever yet has met my wayward will
With pleas'd compliance, and unask'd assent.

ELFRIDA.

And ever shall: yet blame me not, my Lord,
If prying womanhood should prompt a wish
To learn the cause of this your strange commotion,
Which ever wakes, if I but drop one thought
Of quitting Harewood.

ATHELWOLD.

Go to the clear surface
Of yon unruffled lake, and, bending o'er it,
There read my answer.

ELFRIDA.

These are riddles, Sir—

ATHELWOLD.

No; for its glassy and reflecting surface
Will smile with charms too tempting for a palace.

ELFRIDA.

Does ATHELWOLD distrust ELFRIDA's faith?

ATHELWOLD.

No; but he much distrusts ELFRIDA's beauty.

ELFRIDA.

Away: you trifle.

ATHELWOLD.

Never more in earnest;
I would not for the throne which EDGAR sits on,
That EDGAR should behold it.

ELFRIDA.

What, my Lord!
Think you the form, that caught your single heart,
Will make all hearts its captives? Vain surmize.
Yet grant it could? the form is your's alone:
Not EDGAR's self would dare to seize it from you.
EDGAR's a King, and not a tyrant.

ATHELWOLD.

True;
EDGAR's a King, a just one; his firm feet
Walk ever in the fore-right road of honour:
Nor do I know what lure can draw his steps
Devious from that straight path, save only one:

That tempting lure is beauty. Ah! ELFRIDA,
Throw but the dazzling bait within his view,
The untam'd wolf does not with fiercer rage
Burst the slight bondage of the silken net,
Than he the ties of law. Late, very late,
Smit casually with young MATILDA's face,
He straight commanded her reluctant Mother
To yield her to his arms; nor had she 'scap'd
The violating fervour of his love,
Had not the prudent dame suborn'd her handmaid
To take the unchaste office, and be led,
Veil'd in the mask of night, to EDGAR's chamber,
A counterfeit MATILDA. As it chanc'd,
The damsel pleas'd the King, nor did detection
A whit abate his fondness; he forgave
The prudent mother, eas'd MATILDA's fears,
And led the wanton minstrel to his court,
Where still she shares—

CHORUS.

Behold, Earl ATHELWOLD,
A messenger arrives; his speed and aspect
Speak some important errand.

EDWIN, ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

How now, EDWIN?

EDWIN.

The King, my Lord, is on his way to Harewood.

ATHELWOLD.

The King!

EDWIN.

His purpose is to pass through Mercia:
And in a hasty message, some two hours
After you left the palace, this his pleasure
Was sent you by Lord SEOFRID: withal
Commanding your attendance. You being absent,
He straightway turn'd his course through this fair forest,
Meaning to chace the Stag; his train is small,
As was his purpose sudden.

ELFRIDA.

Good my Lord,
Why thus perplex'd!

CHORUS.

Heav'ns! what a deep despair
Sits on his brow!

ELFRIDA.

The notice sure is short;
But that's a trifle, a small train requires
The smaller preparation: let him come.

ATHELWOLD.

Yes, let him come: so thou wilt say, ELFRIDA,
When thou hast heard my tale. Yes, let him come;
So wilt thou say, and let thy husband perish.
Yet shall these arms once more embrace thee closely,
Ere yet thou fly them as the pois'nous adder.
'Tis o'er: in that embrace ELFRIDA's love

Was buried; and in that embrace, the peace
Of wretched ATHELWOLD.

ELFRIDA.

What may this be!

ATHELWOLD.

Oh EDWIN, EDWIN, when surviving malice
Shall prey upon the fame of thy dead master,
Wilt thou not some way strive to check the fiend's
Insatiate fury? wilt thou see my name
Defil'd and blacken'd with detraction's venom,
And bear it patiently?

ELFRIDA.

What means my best—

ATHELWOLD.

Peace; not a word of best, or lov'd, or dear:
Such tender terms are not for thee to use,
Or me to triumph in. Virgins, retire;
We would a while be private. Nay, return.
Concealment would be vain; and ye and EDWIN
Are bound to me. ALBINA! as for you,
I sav'd your father, when his blood was forfeit.

CHORUS.

Not I, great Earl, alone, but all this train
Are bound by ev'ry tie of faith and love
To gen'rous ATHELWOLD; to that mild master,
Who never forc'd our service to one act,
But of such liberal sort, as freedom's self
Would smilingly perform.

ATHELWOLD.

It may be so;
But where's the tie, ELFRIDA, that may bind
Thy faith and love?

ELFRIDA.

The strongest sure, my Lord,
The golden, nuptial tie. Try but its strength.

ATHELWOLD.

I must perforce this instant. Know, ELFRIDA,
Once, on a day of high festivity,
The youthful King, encircled with his Nobles,
Crown'd high the sparkling bowl; and much of love,
Of beauty much the sprightly converse ran.
When, as it well might chance, the brisk Lord ARDULPH
Made gallant note of ORGAR's peerless daughter,
And in such phrase as might enflame a breast
More cool than EDGAR's. Early on the morrow
Th' impatient Monarch gave me swift commission
To view those charms, of which Lord ARDULPH's tongue
Had giv'n such warm description: to whose words
If my impartial eye gave full assent,
I had his royal mandate on the instant
To hail thee Queen of England.

ELFRIDA,

'Stead of which,
You came, and hail'd me wife of ATHELWOLD.
Was this the tale I was so taught to fear?
Was this the deed, that known would make me fly

Thy clasping arm, as 'twere the pois'nous adder;
See, I again embrace thee; dearest proof
That thy ELFRIDA's love can never die;
Or, if it could, that this embrace revives it.

ATHELWOLD.

Dost thou then pardon me? Come, injur'd sov'reign,
Plunge deep thy sword of justice in this breast,
And I will die contented.

ELFRIDA.

Heav'n forbid!
What can be done?

CHORUS.

Indeed, ye constant pair,
'Tis fit ye strive to fly the coming danger:
For safety now sits wav'ring on your love,
Like the light down upon the thistle's beard,
Which ev'ry breeze may part. Say, noble Earl,
What feint was us'd to lull the king's impatience?

ATHELWOLD.

Soon as these shades had veil'd my beauteous bride
I hasted back to EDGAR, laugh'd at ARDULPH,
And talk'd of ELFRID, as of vulgar beauties;
Own'd no uncommon light'ning in her eye,
No breast that sham'd the snow, or cheek the rose,
The sprightly King believ'd me, and forgot her.

CHORUS.

But an alliance, great as ATHELWOLD's
With ORGAR's daughter, soon would blaze abroad,
The theme of popular converse.

ATHELWOLD.

True, it would,
And for that reason, when I last was here,
The King was taught I went to wed ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA.

How so, my lord?

ATHELWOLD.

Thy father, my ELFRIDA,
Has rich possessions: these, and these alone,
I made my theme of love: and told the king,
That though thy face (pardon the impious falshood)
Boasted not charms to grace a Monarch's throne,
Yet would thy dow'r well suit his minister.
I therefore meant to ask thee of thy father,
And (that my want of skill in choice might 'scape
All censure) hide thee close in Harewood castle.
EDGAR with smiles consented, and, I think,
Harbours no thought of my disloyalty.

ELFRIDA.

If so, what danger now?

ATHELWOLD.

Ask'st thou, what danger?
Heav'ns! will that glance not instantly proclaim
My tenfold perfidy?

ELFRIDA.

He shall not see me.
I'll hide me instant in some secret chamber,
And robe this virgin in my bridal vestments.

ATHELWOLD.

Thy love, like balm, runs trickling o'er the wounds
Of my torn bosom; yet 'tis vain, 'tis vain:
Thou must thyself appear, for ARDULPH ever
Attends the King, and would detect the fraud.

ELFRIDA.

If so, yet still I can assure our safety;
For as you fear my softness of complexion,
I'll stain it with the juice of dusky leaves,
Or yellow berries, which this various wood
From tree or shrub will yield me. These I'll use,
And form a thousand methods to conceal
The little gleams of grace, which Nature lent me.
Fear not my caution.

ATHELWOLD.

Gentlest, best of creatures,
Go, do then as thy tender care directs.
And yet how vain! What wond'rous art can steal
The liquid lightnings from those radiant eyes,
Or rob the wavy ringlets of that hair
Of all their nameless graces? Say it could,
Yet would that modest, but majestic mien,
That inborn dignity of soul, which breathes
Through each angelic gesture, still remain
To seize the heart of EDGAR. Rest, ELFRIDA,
Rest as thou art, in all that blaze of beauty:
I must submit to my just lot, and lose thee.

ELFRIDA.

Away, my Lord, with these too anxious scruples:
Fear not my carriage; I will stoop my head,
Drawl out an idiot phrase, and do each act
With ev'n a rude and peasant awkwardness.

EDWIN.

Ere this, my Lord, I think, the King has reach'd
The full mid-way; 'twere fit you stood prepar'd
To give him meeting.

ATHELWOLD.

Give him meeting, EDWIN!
Alas! I have no mask to veil my baseness.
When deep contrition shadows all my soul,
I cannot dress my features in light smiles,
And look the thing I am not. No, these eyes
Are not as yet true vassals to my purpose;
As yet indeed I am but half a villain.

ELFRIDA.

You weigh this matter in too nice a balance.
Your crime, my Lord, is but the crime of love:
Thousands like you have fail'd.

ATHELWOLD.

I know, ELFRIDA,
Could love absolve the crime, my soul were pure
As maiden innocence. Yes, I do love thee,
And thou art fair—beyond—But that's my bane;
Thy ev'ry charm adds weight to my offence,
And heaps fresh wrongs upon the best of masters.

Yes, ELFRID, EDGAR was the best of masters.
Oh hide me from the thought in that dear bosom—
Heav'ns! I must die or keep her.

ELFRIDA.

Live, or die,
I'm thine alike. Death cannot aught abate,
Or life augment, my love. Let this embrace
Be witness of my truth.

ATHELWOLD.

It shall, it shall:
Thy ev'ry word and look declares thee faithful:
Secure of all thy love, and all thy prudence,
Returning confidence has arm'd my soul
For this dread meeting: resting on thy truth
I go— [*Exit Athelwold.*

ELFRIDA.

Go, and thy guardian saint preserve thee,
Show'r blessings vast as would my lavish love,
Had I his power to bless thee!

CHORUS.

Yes, my Sisters,
The silent awe that reigns through all your train,
Befits ye well. Let admiration first
Pay her mute tribute. She can best express,
By those her kindling cheeks, and lifted eyes
Where the tear twinkles, that transcendent praise
ELFRIDA's virtue claims.

ELFRIDA.

My virtue, Virgins,
Is only love. Or, say that it be virtue,
It owes its source to love, to chastest love,
Than which what passion more impels the mind
To fair and gen'rous action? But the hours
Are precious now. I'll to yon neighb'ring grove:
There grows an azure flow'r, I oft have mark'd it,
Which stains the pressing finger with a juice
Of dusky, yellow tinct: Its name I know not,
I'll fetch and try it straight. Wait my return.

[*Exit Elfrida.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

I.

Whence does this sudden lustre rise,
That gilds the grove? Not like the noontide beam,
Which sparkling dances on the trembling stream,
Nor the blue lightning's flash swift-shooting thro' the skies.
But such a solemn steady light,
As o'er the cloudless azure steals,
When Cynthia, riding on the brow of night,
Stops in their mid career her silver wheels.

II.

Whence can it rise, but from the sober power
Of CONSTANCY? She, heav'n-born queen,

Descends, and here in HAREWOOD's hallow'd bower,
Fixes her stedfast reign:
Stedfast, as when her high command
Gives to the starry band
Their radiant stations in heav'n's ample plain.
Stedfast, as when around this nether sphere,
She winds the various year;
Tells what time the snow-drop cold
Its maiden whiteness may unfold,
When the golden harvest bend,
When the ruddy fruits descend.
Then bids pale Winter wake, to pour
The pearly hail's translucent show'r,
To cast his silv'ry mantle o'er the woods,
And bind in crystal chains the slumb'ring floods.

III.

The soul, which she inspires, has pow'r to climb
To all the heights sublime
Of Virtue's tow'ring hill.
That hill, at whose low foot weak-warbling strays
The scanty stream of human praise,
A shallow trickling rill.
While on the summits hov'ring angels shed,
From their blest pinions, the nectareous dews
Of rich immortal fame: From these the Muse
Oft steals some precious drops, and skilful blends
With those the lower fountain lends;

Then show'rs it all on some high-favour'd head.
But thou, ELFRIDA, claim'st the genuine dew;
Thy worth demands it all,
Pure, and unmixt, on thee the holy drops shall fall.
[*Elfrida returns with flowers.*

ELFRIDA, ORGAR, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA *(looking on the flower)*.

'Tis strange, my Virgins, this sweet child of summer,
Silken and soft, whose breath perfumes the air,
Whose gay vest paints the morn, should in its bosom
Hide such pollution? Yet 'tis often thus:
All are not as they seem.

ORGAR.

Yet hear me, Lady.

ELFRIDA.

Be gone, unmanner'd stranger, nor pursue me;
Hence, from the grove. Know ye this Pilgrim, Virgins?
On my return I met him here.

CHORUS.

Alas!
We saw him here before, and heard his tale,
That mov'd our pity—But I fear me now,
'Twas false; some spy, perchance, and may have heard—

ORGAR.

I have; yet not for that are you betray'd.
Fair excellence, my heart is bound unto you,
I feel a tender interest in your welfare,
Tender as fathers feel.

ELFRIDA.

As fathers feel!

That well known voice, and ah! that look—

ORGAR.

Elfrida!

ELFRIDA.

Yes, it is he, it is my Father: Virgins,
Support me, or I faint! Oh, wherefore, Sir?

ORGAR.

Take courage, Daughter; my parental fondness
Prompted this visit. Thus I came disguis'd,
To learn the cause of my dear child's confinement:
And I have learnt it.

ELFRIDA.

Then all's lost for ever.

ORGAR.

Thou know'st, Elfrida, next my house's honour,
Thy peace has ever been my dearest care.
But such an insult—No: I cannot brook it.
So black a fraud! By all my ancestors,
By Belin's shade I will have ample vengeance.

ELFRIDA.

Alas! I know too well your dreadful purpose.
I knew it at the first. Yes, he must fall.
Yet pardon me, if my poor trembling heart
Puts up I know not what of pray'rs and vows
To ev'ry pitying saint. Celestial Guardians
Of nuptial constancy! Oh bend from heav'n

Your star-crown'd heads, and hear a wretched woman,
That begs ye save, from a dread father's rage,
Her lord, her husband.

ORGAR.

Husband! Sooner call
Th' impeached thief true master of the booty
He stole, or murder'd for. Disdain the villain;
And help me to revenge thee.

CHORUS.

Think, great Earl;
What sanctimonious ties restrain your daughter.
Did she not swear before the hallow'd shrine
Eternal fealty to this her lord?
Yet say, that he deceiv'd her; shall her truth
Dare to revenge? No, Sir, in highest heav'n
Vengeance in storms and tempests sits enshrin'd,
Vested in robes of lightning, and there sleeps,
Unwak'd but by the incens'd Almighty's call.
Oh! let not man presume to take unbid
That dread vicegerency.

ORGAR.

Peace, Virgins, peace.
Not ev'n the saws of Druids or of Bards
Have weight with me, when insults high as this
Rouse my just indignation. Hear me, Daughter;
You went to search for flow'rs, to blot your charms
With their dun hue. Yes, thou shalt search for flow'rs,
Yet shall they be the loveliest of the spring;

Flow'rs, that entangling in thine auburn hair,
Or blushing 'mid the whiteness of thy bosom,
May, to the power of ev'ry native grace,
Give double life and lustre. Haste, my child,
Array thyself in thy most gorgeous garb,
And see each jewel, which my love procur'd thee,
Dart its full radiance. More than all, put on
The nobler ornament of winning smiles,
And kind inviting glances.

ELFRIDA.

Never, never;
When this true heart renounces ATHELWOLD,
May equitable Heav'n—

ORGAR.

Away with vows;
And with a duteous, and attentive ear,
Listen to my persuasions. Much I wish
Persuasions might prevail, that not compell'd
To use a father's just prerogative,
My will may meet with thy unforc'd obedience.
Follow me, on thy duty.

ELFRIDA.

Cruel Father,
That duty shall obey you; I will follow:
Yet dread as is that frown, dreadful as death,
It shall not shake the tenor of my faith;
Living or dead I still am ATHELWOLD'S.

[*Exeunt Orgar and Elfrida.*

SEMICHORUS.

Horror! Horror!
The pen of fate, dipt in its deepest gall,
Perhaps on that ill-omen'd wall,
Now writes th' event of this tremendous day.
Oh! that our weaker sight
Could read the mystic characters, and spy
What to the unpurg'd, mortal eye,
Is hid in endless night.

SEMICHORUS.

Suspense! thou frozen guest, begone.
The wretch, whose rugged bed
Is spread on thorns, more softly rests his head,
Than he that sinks amid the cygnet's down,
If thou, tormenting fiend, be nigh,
To prompt his starting tear, his ceaseless sigh,
His wish, his pray'r, his vow for ling'ring certainty.

CHORUS.

But hark! that certainty arrives. Methought
I heard the winding horn. I did not err;
The King is near at hand. This quick approach
Will sure prevent this proud Earl's cruel purpose.
Yet what of that? Does her fair form require
The blazon of rich vesture? Genuine beauty
Nor asks, nor needs it: Negligence alone
Is its bright diadem, and artless ease
Its robe of Tyrian tincture. Say, my Sisters,
Shall we salute this monarch with a hymn

Of festival and joy? Alas! such joy
Ill suits our trembling hearts, and weeping eyes.
And now 'twere vain; for see, the King approaches.

EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, CHORUS.

EDGAR.

No, ATHELWOLD; not from a partial blindness,
Or for the mode and guise of courtesy,
Are we thus large in praise; in our true judgment,
This castle is not more kind Nature's debtor
For its delicious site, than 'tis to thee
For this so goodly structure. From its base,
Ev'n to yon turrets trim, and taper spires,
All is of choicest masonry. Each part
Doth boast a separate grace, yet each combines
To form one graceful whole; for ornament,
Though here the richest that the eye can note,
Is us'd, not lavish'd; Art seems generous here,
Yet not a prodigal. But ah! my Earl,
[*Seeing the Chorus.*
What living charms are here? Thy castle's beauty
Must not detain me from this lovelier prospect.
Your pardon, fair ones, that my wayward eye
Paid not at first, where first was surely due,
Its homage to your graces.

ATHELWOLD.

Heav'ns! they weep.
What may this mean? Some dread and unseen chance
Has counter-work'd my safety.

EDGAR.

Whence this silence?
Why are your lovely heads thus bow'd with sadness?
Beshrew my heart, my Lord, but this is strange.
I know thee, Earl, and know thy gentleness,
More prone t' obey, than lord it o'er the sex;
Else should I guess this sorrow had its rise
From some discourteous treatment.

CHORUS.

No, dread Sov'reign;
He is the noblest, gentlest, best of masters;
And may your love reward——

ORGAR, ATHELWOLD, EDGAR, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Death to my hopes!

ORGAR.

Yes, Villain, start; but let this vengeful arm
Arrest thy baseness: would to Heav'n its strength,
Thus grasping thee, could open thy false breast,
And bare thy heart to the sham'd eye of day.

EDGAR.

Patience, hot man. What art thou?

ORGAR.

Earl of Devon.
Pardon me, Prince; that this my honest rage
O'erleaps obedient duty. I am wrong'd,
Yet that's but small; for know, much-injur'd Prince,

Thy wrongs as well as mine both call for justice.
Yes, Sir, I here, on a true subject's oath,
Proclaim Earl ATHELWOLD a faithless traitor.

EDGAR.

Ha! what is this? Renounce the word, old Earl;
Thy length of years hath forc'd thee, sure, to press
The verge of dotage. ATHELWOLD! what, ATHELWOLD
A faithless traitor! Perish the suspicion.
Never before did word, or thought, or look
Give doubt of his distinguish'd loyalty:
Dotage alone could frame the accusation.

ORGAR.

I do not dote; thank Heav'n, my faculties
Are yet my own, unblemish'd and unhurt.
Would so my Daughter were!

EDGAR.

What is his drift?

ATHELWOLD.

Better, my royal Lord, you mark'd him not;
The wayward Earl is—

ORGAR.

What, audacious Villain!
I will be heard.

EDGAR,

Go to, thou choleric Lord!

ORGAR.

When thou hast heard me, EDGAR, call me choleric.

EDGAR.

Speak then, and briefly.

ORGAR.

Once, my sacred Liege,
I had a daughter, duteous as e'er crown'd
A father's wish, and lovely as could warm
A youth to am'rous transports. This, my Lord,
You learnt long since from noble ARDULPH's praises.
And, fir'd with his description, sent this Earl,
This faithful Earl, t'invite her to your throne.

EDGAR.

No, ORGAR, not t'invite her to our throne;
Simply to note her beauty was his errand.

ORGAR.

Yes, he did note it, stampt it for his own.
But why this parley? Enter, Sir, these gates,
And let ELFRIDA's features be the book,
Where you may read the story of his falshood,
Ev'n on the instant.

EDGAR.

Noble Lord, lead on:
We'll follow to the trial. I will humour
The Earl's hot temper. He has heard my friend,
We meant t'exalt his daughter, and for that
His partial fondness, link'd with his ambition,
Levels this rage at thee. Attend us, Lords.

[*Exeunt Edgar, Orgar, &c.*

CHORUS, ATHELWOLD.

CHORUS.

My Lord, the King is enter'd: stand not thus
In mute and fixt distress.

ATHELWOLD.

Away, away;
What! can a man that thinks such thoughts as I do
Have pow'r of word or motion? speak to me;
Inform me all. What said she, when I left her?
How came her Father hither? how did she
Greet his arrival? say, was she compell'd,
Or did her free and voluntary voice
Tell all the story? Did she marshal him
To this his deed of vengeance;

CHORUS.

Dearest Master;
Elfrida told him not: his own deceit
Was his informer. Here the Earl arriv'd
Early at morn, in mean and pilgrim weeds,
All like an ancient, toil-worn traveller;
And with a tale, told in such piteous strain,
Fraught with such sad and moving circumstance,
With woes so well dissembled, that our softness
Suffer'd him enter this close bow'r for rest,
Which he adapting to his prying purpose,
Thence learnt the secret. This our disobedience,
We own—

ATHELWOLD.

Was my perdition. Yet 'tis well;
I blame ye not; it was Heav'n's justice, Virgins;
This brought him hither; this annull'd your faith.
I do not think, you purpos'd my destruction;
But yet you have destroy'd me. Oh ELFRIDA,
And art thou faithful? This my jealous eye
Thought it had mark'd some speck of change upon thee;
Thought it had found, what might have made thy loss
Somewhat within endurance. 'Tis not so;
And this thy purity but serves t' augment
The sum of my distractions. Meet me, EDGAR,
With thy rais'd sword: be merciful and sudden—

[*Exit Athelwold.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. 1.

Say, will no white-rob'd Son of Light,
Swift-darting from his heav'nly height,
Here deign to take his hallow'd stand;
Here wave his amber locks; unfold
His pinions cloth'd with downy gold;
Here smiling stretch his tutelary wand?
And you, ye host of Saints, for ye have known
Each dreary path in life's perplexing maze,
Though now ye circle yon eternal throne
With harpings high of inexpressive praise,

Will not your train descend in radiant state,
To break with Mercy's beam this gath'ring cloud of Fate?

I. 2.

'Tis silence all. No Son of Light
Darts swiftly from his heav'nly height;
No train of radiant Saints descend.
" Mortals, in vain ye hope to find,
" If guilt, if fraud has stain'd your mind,
" Or Saint to hear, or Angel to defend."
So TRUTH proclaims. I hear the sacred sound
Burst from the centre of her burning throne;
Where aye she sits with star-wreath'd lustre crown'd:
A bright sun clasps her adamantine zone.
So TRUTH proclaims: her awful voice I hear:
With many a solemn pause it slowly meets my ear.

I. 3.

" Attend, ye sons of men; attend, and say,
" Does not enough of my refulgent ray
" Break through the veil of your mortality!
" Say, does not reason in this form descry
" Unnumber'd, nameless glories, that surpass
" The Angel's floating pomp, the Seraph's glowing grace?

II. 1.

" Shall then your earth-born daughters vie
" With me? Shall she, whose brightest eye

" But emulates the diamond's blaze,
" Whose cheek but mocks the peaches' bloom,
" Whose breath the hyacinth's perfume,
" Whose melting voice the warbling woodlark's lays,
" Shall she be deem'd my rival? Shall a form
" Of elemental dross, of mould'ring clay,
" Vie with these charms imperial? The poor worm
" Shall prove her contest vain. Life's little day
" Shall pass, and she is gone: while I appear
" Flush'd with the bloom of youth thro' Heav'n's eternal
" year.

II. 2.

" Know, Mortals, know, ere first ye sprung,
" Ere first these orbs in ether hung,
" I shone amid the heav'nly throng.
" These eyes beheld Creation's day,
" This voice began the choral lay,
" And taught Archangels their triumphant song.
" Pleas'd I survey'd bright Nature's gradual birth,
" Saw infant Light with kindling lustre spread,
" Soft vernal fragrance clothe the flow'ring earth,
" And Ocean heave on his extended bed;
" Saw the tall pine aspiring pierce the sky,
" The tawny lion stalk, the rapid eagle fly.

III. 3.

" Last, Man arose, erect in youthful grace,
" Heav'n's hallow'd image stampt upon his face,

" And, as he rose, the high behest was giv'n,
" That I alone, of all the host of heav'n,
" Should reign Protectress of the godlike youth.
" Thus the Almighty spake: he spake, and call'd me
" TRUTH."

ATHELWOLD, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Banish me! No. I'll die. For why should life
Remain a lonely lodger in that breast
Which honour leaves deserted? Idle breath,
Thou can'st not fill such vacancy. Begone.
This sword shall free——.

CHORUS.

Oh shame to Fortitude!
Shame to that manly passion, which inspires
Its vigorous warmth, when the bleak blasts of Fate
Would chill the soul. Oh call the ready virtue
Quick to thy aid, for she is ever near thee;
Is ever prompt to spread her sevenfold shield
O'er noble breasts.

ATHELWOLD.

And but o'er noble breasts;
Not o'er the breast which livid infamy
Indelibly has spotted. Oh shame, shame!
Sword, rid me of the thought.

CHORUS.

Forbear, forbear;

Think what a sea of deep perdition whelms
The wretch's trembling soul, who launches forth
Unlicens'd to eternity. Think, think;
And let the thought restrain thy impious hand.
The race of man is one vast marshall'd army,
Summon'd to pass the spacious realms of time;
Their leader the Almighty. In that march
Ah who may quit his post, when high in air
The chos'n Archangel rides, whose right hand wields
Th' imperial standard of Heav'n's providence,
Which, dreadly sweeping through the vaulted sky,
O'ershadows all creation?

ATHELWOLD.

I was once———

Yes, I was once (I have his royal word for 't)
A man of such try'd faith, such steady honour,
As mock'd all doubt and scruple.—What a change!
Now must that unstain'd, virgin character,
Be doom'd to gross and hourly prostitution,
Sating the lust of slander; and my wife,
My chaste Elfrida—Oh distraction! no,
I'll fly to save her.

EDWIN.

Stay, my dearest Master;
You rush on instant death.

ATHELWOLD.

I mean it, Slave,
And would'st thou hinder me?

EDWIN.

Yes, Sir, I hold
'Tis duty to my King, and love to you,
Thus to oppose your entrance.

ATHELWOLD.

What, thou Traitor!
Thy pardon, EDWIN, I forgot myself;
Forgot, that I stood here a banish'd man;
And that this gate was shut against its master.
And yet this gate leads to my dear ELFRIDA;
Can it be barr'd to me? Oh earth, cold earth,
Upon whose breast I cast this load of mis'ry,
Bear it a while; and you, ye aged oaks,
Ye venerable fathers of this wood,
Who oft have cool'd beneath your arching shades
My humble ancestors, oft seen them hie
To your spread umbrage, from yon sultry field,
Their scene of honest labour, shade, ah! shade
The last, the wretchedest of all their race.
I will not long pollute ye; for I mean
To pay beneath your consecrated gloom
A sacrifice to honour, and the ghosts
Of those progenitors, who sternly frown
On me their base descendant.

EDWIN.

See, ye Virgins,
How horror shades his brow; how fixt his eye;
Heav'ns! what despair—

CHORUS.

EDWIN, 'tis ever thus
With noble minds, if chance they slide to folly;
Remorse stings deeper, and relentless conscience
Pours more of gall into the bitter cup
Of their severe repentance.

ATHELWOLD.

'Tis resolved;
I'll enter and demand a second audience.
And yet how vain! ere I can reach his ear,
His ready train will stop me, and, with all
The cruel punctuality of office,
So prompt to act against fall'n favourites,
Dismiss me with reproof.—Surely I heard her.
Was't not ELFRIDA's voice? 'Tis she herself.

ELFRIDA, EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, ORGAR, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

No, I will once more clasp him to my bosom,
I will not be withheld, I will o'ertake him,
Will go with him to exile. Hah, my Husband!
So quickly found? they thought to tear me from thee;
But we will part no more.

EDGAR.

Take heed, ELFRIDA.
This ill-tim'd fondness may recall the fate

I just now freed him from; who loves like me
Can ill brook this. Or quit him, or he dies.

ATHELWOLD.

Yes, let me die! death is my dearest wish.
Quit me, ELFRIDA! leave me to my fate.
'Tis just, 'tis just. Thus to my Sov'reign's sword
Freely I bare my breast. Strike, injur'd Prince;
But do not banish me.

ELFRIDA.

What, ATHELWOLD,
Is then the life, on whose dear preservation
ELFRIDA's peace depends, not worth the saving!
Die then. But ere thy murd'rer strike the stroke,
Let me inform him, that his act destroys
No single life.

EDGAR.

By Heav'n, she loves the traitor
Beyond all hope of change ——

ELFRIDA.

No, ATHELWOLD,
Thou shalt not die: That pause in royal EDGAR
Bespeaks forgiveness. He will soon relent;
And mercy, flowing from his gracious tongue,
Seal thy full pardon. Let us kneel, my Lord;
Seize the important moment; kneel together,
And as these streaming eyes and lifted hands
Employ each act of silent supplication,
Do thou recount—Ah! no, thy modest tongue

Could never tell ev'n half the gallant story.
Be silent then. Let EDGAR's self reflect;
For well I know his mem'ry writes thy virtues
Upon its fairest page. Yes, let him weigh
All thy past deeds of loyalty and faith,
'Gainst this so light a fault.

EDGAR.

So light a fault!
Had he dislodg'd my richest coffer'd treasures,
Dispers'd sedition's poison 'mid my troops,
Or aim'd with daring and rebellious hand
To snatch these regal honours from my brow,
I sooner could have pardon'd.

ATHELWOLD.

Cease, ELFRIDA,
My doom is just—Yes, royal Sir, I go
To banishment. I do deserve to breathe,
Deserve to bear this load of life about me,
For many years; to lengthen out my age,
List'ning the hourly knell of curst Remembrance,
Whose leaden stroke shall tell to my sad soul
That I was faithful once.

ELFRIDA.

Oh flinty EDGAR,
What! will this penitence not move thee? Know
There is a rose-lip'd Seraph sits on high,
Who ever bends his holy ear to earth
To mark the voice of Penitence, to catch

Her solemn sighs, to tune them to his harp,
And echo them in harmonies divine
Up to the throne of Grace. Ev'n Heav'n is won
By penitence, and shall Heav'n's substitute,
Shall EDGAR scorn——

EDGAR.

Cease, cease, thou beauteous pleader,
Ah! far too beauteous! Would'st thou gain thy suit,
Why glows that vermeil lip; why rolls that eye
Bright as the ray of morn? why in each gesture
Such inexpressive graces, but because
They're native all, and will not be conceal'd?
Else sure each charm betrays him, and becomes
An advocate, whose silent eloquence
Pleads 'gainst thy voice, and foils its tuneful power.
Traitor! was this the face which thy false tongue
Profan'd as vulgar? This such common beauty
As the fair eye of Day beheld each hour
In ev'ry clime he lighted? Base Dissembler,
This instant quit our realm.

ELFRIDA.

Oh stay thee, EDGAR,
And once more hear me. At thy feet I fall
As earnest, and distrest a supplicant,
As e'er embrac'd the knees of Majesty.
Oh! spare thy Country's guardian, EDGAR, spare
Thy closest, surest friend. Let not one fault
Cancel his thousand, thousand acts of faith.

Alas! I fall to vainest repetition.
Grief, whelming grief drowns all my faculties,
And leaves me nought but tears

EDGAR.

Rise, rise, ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA.

Shall he then live?

EDGAR.

He shall, he shall, my Fair,
If so he quit the realm within the space
Our sentence limited.

ELFRIDA,

Oh stop not there;
That sentence will be death to ATHELWOLD.
Think, for thou know'st full well his gentle nature,
Can he support the rigour of this doom?
Can he, who liv'd but in thy gracious smiles,
Who'd pine, if chance those smiles a single hour
Were dealt him thriftily; think, can he bear
The infamy of exile?

EDGAR.

Hear me, ATHELWOLD.
Did I not show'r on thy much-favour'd head
My thickest honours, and with gift so ready
As out-run all request? Did I not hold thee
Still in such open confidence of friendship,
Such love as——

ATHELWOLD.

Sooner stab me than repeat it.

EDGAR.

Yet give me hearing. I repeat not this
To taunt or gall thee: On my soul thy worth
Did o'ertop all those honours, and thy zeal
Kept pace with my best love. Nor 'till this deed—
But such a deed! look there, look on that face.
Thou know'st me, ATHELWOLD, hast seen me gaze
On a soft yielding fair one, 'till mine eye
Shot flames. Perdition seize me, if this heart
Knew love 'till now.

ATHELWOLD.

I see it plain, my Liege,
Nor say I aught to lessen my offence.
No, here I kneel, Oh! cast but on my mis'ry
One kind forgiving glance; this ready sword
Shall expiate all.

ELFRIDA.

Ah! will you? must he die?

EDGAR.

No, stay thee, ATHELWOLD, and sheath thy sword;
I never yet (save but this hour of rage)
Deem'd thee my subject: Thou wert still my friend;
And injur'd as I am, thou still art such.
I do forego the word; to banish thee,
Or seal thy death, transcends a friend's just right.

ELFRIDA.

Ah gen'rous deed! ah godlike goodness! Virgins,
The King will pardon him. 'Wake each high note
Of praise, and gratitude, teach EDGAR's name
To Harewood's farthest echo. Oh, my Sov'reign!
What words can speak my thanks—

EDGAR.

Nay, check these transports,
Lest, if I see thee thus, my soul forget
Its milder purpose. I will leave thee, Lady;
Yet first my lips must press this gentle hand,
And breathe one soft sigh of no common fervour.
Now on, my Lords—Fair wonder of thy sex,
Adieu. We'll straight unto our realm of Mercia.
Yet first, as was our purpose, through this forest
We'll chace the nimble roebuck; may the sport
More please us, than we hope. Earl ATHELWOLD,
Thou too must join our train; follow us straight.

[*Exeunt Edgar, &c.*

ATHELWOLD.

I will, my Liege. ELFRIDA, I have much
For thy lov'd ear, and have but one farewel
To tell it all—And yet——

ELFRIDA.

Ah, loiter not;
It may enrage. Farewel. Be sure, take heed
I come not in your talk; avoid ev'n thinking;

Check ev'n the sighs of absence. Haste, my Earl,
Oh haste thee, as thou lov'st thy constant wife.

[*Exit Athelwold.*

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ORGAR.

Thy constant wife! ah, stain of all thy race,
Degen'rate girl! Henceforth be ORGAR deem'd
Of soft, and dove-like temper, who could see
A child of his stoop to such vile abasement,
And yet forbore just wrath; forbore to draw
That blood she had defil'd from her mean veins.
But sure thou art not mine; some Elf or Fay
Did spirit away my babe, and by curst charms
Thee in her cradle plac'd. Nay hang not on me.
Dry, dry thy tears, they've done their office amply:
EDGAR has pardon'd him. No, by my earldom,
I cannot think of majesty thus meanly.
He'll yet avenge it.—What if chance he should not?
That stops not me: I have a heart, an arm,
A sword can do me justice.

ELFRIDA.

Ah! my Lord,
Are you still merciless? Alas! I hop'd——

ORGAR.

What couldst thou hope, ELFRIDA? couldst thou think
I e'er would pardon his vile perfidy,
Or thy ignoble softness?

ELFRIDA.

Dearest Father,
Frown not thus sternly on me. I would fain
Touch your relenting soul, fain win your heart
To fatherly forgiveness. For through life
I've oft had pleasing proof how that forgiveness
Stoop'd to my fond persuasion. But I fear
Persuasion now has left me. My sad thoughts
Are all on wing, all following ATHELWOLD,
Like unseen ministring spirits:—Pardon, Sir,
That frown shall check me, I'll not mention him;
I will but plead for my own weakness, plead
For that soft sympathy of soul which you
Deem base and servile. Base perhaps it might be,
Were I of bolder sex. But I, alas!——
Ah, pardon me, if Nature stampt me Woman:
Gave me a heart soft, gentle, prone to pity,
And very fearful: Fearful, sure with cause
At this dread hour, when if one hapless word,
One sigh break forth unbid, it may rekindle
The Monarch's rage—What has my phrenzy said?
I've wander'd from my meaning. Dearest Virgins,
My rash tongue more inflames him. Oh assist me,
Ye are not thus opprest with inward horror:
Kneel, plead, persuade, convince——

CHORUS.

Alas, my Mistress,
What may a servant's accents do t'appease
This furious Earl?

ORGAR.

Ye well may spare them: Maidens,
Know my firm soul's resolv'd, and be my heart
As base as ATHELWOLD's, if it forgoes
The honest resolution. Think what I,
What Britain suffers from this traitor's fraud:
Had EDGAR rais'd my daughter to his throne,
Our British line, which now is doom'd to sink
In vile subjection, had again assum'd
The pall of royalty, with half its power,
In time, perchance, the whole. But this false Saxon
Shall with his life repay me. Here I'll wait
His first return, and in his own domain
Give him fair combat. I have known the time
When this good arm had hardihood enough
For thrice his prowess. What is lost through age,
My just cause shall supply; and he shall fall
As did the traitor OSWALD, whose bold tongue
Defam'd me to King ATHELSTAN: To the ground
My sharp lance nail'd the caitiff. [*Exit Orgar.*

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

Think, my Lord,
Will ATHELWOLD, will he enter those lists,
Where conquest would be parricide? Alas,
He hears me not. Go, thou obdurate Father;
A daughter's tears will but the more provoke thee.

I will not follow him. No, poor ELFRIDA,
All thou can'st do is here to stand, and weep,
And feel that thou art wretched.

CHORUS.

Dearest Mistress,
Restrain this flood of tears, perhaps——

ELFRIDA.

Perhaps!
Ah! mock me not with hopes.

CHORUS.

We do not mean it:
For Hope, though 'tis pale Sorrow's only cordial,
Has yet a dull and opiate quality,
Enfeebling what it lulls. It suits not you;
For, as we fear——

ELFRIDA.

Do you too fear? Alas!
I flatter'd my poor soul that all its fears
Were grief's distemper'd coinage, that my love
Rais'd causeless apprehensions, and at length
EDGAR would quite forgive. I do bethink me,
My joy broke forth too rashly. When they left us,
His safety was not half secur'd; my pleading
Was not half heard; I should have follow'd EDGAR,
Claim'd more full pardon, forc'd him to embrace
My sorrowing Lord.

CHORUS.

We fear that sorrow more

Than EDGAR's rage. We fear his fallen virtue.
Self-condemnation works most strongly on him,
Ev'n to despondency. Ev'n at his pardon,
No joy flush'd on his cheek; we mark'd him well,
He shew'd no sign of welcome. No, he took it
As who should say, " To give me aught but death
" Is a poor boon unwish'd and unaccepted."
Too much we fear he'll do some impious act—

ELFRIDA.

What, on his life? I thought I had explor'd
Each various face of danger: this escap'd me.
How miss'd I this? It suits his courage highly;
Suits too his fix'd remorse.—But yet he will not:
No, ATHELWOLD, thou wilt not kill ELFRIDA.

CHORUS.

Oh may his love preserve him: may these shades
Receive him soon in peace. To this blest end
You sure should strive to calm your Father's rage;
At least not suffer him, as now, retir'd
To brood o'er his revenge. For know, ELFRIDA,
Beneath the silent gloom of Solitude
Though Peace can sit and smile; though meek Content
Can keep the cheerful tenor of her soul,
Ev'n in the loneliest shades; yet let not Wrath
Approach, let black Revenge keep far aloof,
Or soon they flame to madness.

ELFRIDA.

True, my Virgins;

Attend me then: I'll try each winning art:
Though ill such art becomes me, yet I'll aim it—
Hark—Whence that noise? I heard some hasty foot-
steps.

CHORUS.

Oh Heav'ns! 'tis EDWIN.

ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

EDWIN, ah! that look
Bespeaks too well the horror of thy errand.
Tell it me all.

EDWIN.

Alas!——

ELFRIDA.

Nay, do not pause;
Tell it me all. I think it will not kill me.
Repeat each circumstance. I'm ready, EDWIN,
Ev'n for the worst.

EDWIN.

Then hear, and Heav'n support thee.
Soon as the stag had left yon westward thicket,
The King dismiss'd his Lords, each sev'ral ways,
To their best sport, bidding Earl ATHELWOLD,
Lord ARDULPH, and myself, attend his person.
Thus parted from the rest, the Monarch piere'd
A darkling dell, which open'd in a lawn
Thick set with elm around. Suddenly here

He turn'd his steed, and cry'd, " This place befits
" Our purpose well."

ELFRIDA.

Purpose! what purpose, EDWIN?
'Twas predetermin'd then, dissembling tyrant!
How could I trust or hope——

EDWIN.

Yet give me hearing:
Thus with a grave composure, and calm eye,
King EDGAR spake. " Now hear me, ATHELWOLD;
" Thy King has pardon'd this thy trait'rous act:
" From all disloyal baseness to thy prince
" Thou stand'st absolv'd; yet, know, there still remains
" Somewhat to cancel more. As man to man,
" As friend to friend, now, ATHELWOLD, I call thee
" Straight to defend thy life with thy good sword.
" Nay, answer not; defend it gallantly.
" If thy arm prosper, this my dying tongue
" Shall pardon thee, and bless thee. If thou fall'st,
" Thy parting breath must to my right resign
" ELFRIDA's beauties." At the word, both drew,
Both fought; but ATHELWOLD's was ill-play'd passion.
He aim'd his falchion at the Monarch's head,
Only to leave his own brave breast defenceless.
And on the instant EDGAR's rapid sword
Pierc'd my dear master's heart. He fell to earth,
And, falling, cry'd, " This wound atones for all.
" EDGAR, thus full aveng'd, will pardon me,

" And my true wife, with chaste, connubial tears,
" Embalm my memory." He smil'd, and died.

ELFRIDA.

Nay, come not round me, Virgins, nor support me.
I do not swoon, nor weep. I call not Heav'n
T' avenge my wretchedness. I do not wish
This tyrant's hand may wither with cold palsies.
No, I am very patient. Heav'n is just!
And, when the measure of his crimes is full,
Will bare its red right arm, and launch its lightnings.
'Till then, ye elements rest: and thou, firm Earth,
Ope not thy yawning jaws, but let this monster
Stalk his due time on thine affrighted surface.
Yes; let him still go on; still execute
His savage purposes, and daily make
More widows weep, as I do. Foolish eyes!
Why flow ye thus unbidden? What have tears
To do with grief like mine?

CHORUS.

Help, help, my Sisters,
To bear her to the castle.

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ORGAR.

As I past,
Methought I heard a sound of loud lament;
Elfrida, ah!

ELFRIDA.

Is not my father there?

Withhold me not; I'll fall at his dear feet.
Oh, Sir! behold your child thus lowly prostrate;
Avenge her wrongs, avenge your poor ELFRIDA,
Your helpless widow'd Daughter.

ORGAR.

Widow'd Daughter!
What; is he slain?

ELFRIDA.

Inhospitably butcher'd;
The tyrant's savage self—Stand you thus cool?
Where is the British spirit, where the fire
Of BELIN's race?——Oh foolishness of grief!
Alas, I had forgot; had EDGAR spar'd him,
That sword, to which my madness call'd for vengeance,
Ere long was meant to do the bloody deed,
And make the murder parricide. Have I
No friend to do me right?

ORGAR.

Thou hast, my child;
I am thy friend, thy father. Trust my care.
EDWIN, a word. Retire, my dearest Daughter:
Virgins, conduct her in.

ELFRIDA.

My Father, No.
What do you do? I must not be withheld.
I'll to yon bloody grove, and clasp my Husband,
My murder'd Husband. Why restrain me, Sir?
Can my sad eye dart fire through his cold breast,
And light up life anew?

ORGAR.

Go in, my child,

And seek tranquillity.

ELFRIDA.

Tranquillity!

I know her well; she is Death's pale-ey'd sister;
She's now in yonder grove closing the lids
Of my poor ATHELWOLD. That office done,
She'll bear his soul upon her gentle plumes
Up to the realms of joy. I'll follow them:
I know he'd have it so: He'll not be blest,
Ev'n on his throne of bliss, till I am with him.

CHORUS.

This way, my dearest Mistress.

ELFRIDA.

Hold, nay hold;

Crowd not around me. Let me pause a while.
ALBINA, thou alone shalt join my mis'ry;
I've much to utter to thy friendly ear
Lead on, thou gentle maid; thy single arm
Shall prop my trembling frame; thy single voice
Speak peace to my afflictions.

[*Exit with the principal Virgin.*

ORGAR, EDWIN, SEMICHORUS.

ORGAR.

On your lives,

Virgins, let no disturbing step approach her.
Say, EDWIN (for I guess 'twas you that brought

These tidings hither) where was royal EDGAR,
When late you left him?

EDWIN.

At my master's side,
Repentant of the stroke.

ORGAR.

Comes he not back
To Harewood?

SEMICHORUS.

Heav'n forbid! ELFRIDA's brain
Would madden at the sight.

ORGAR.

Mistake not, Virgins;
I did not mean at this distressful hour
The King should see my daughter.

SEMICHORUS.

No, for pity,
Do not profane this sabbath of her grief.
Oh! be her sorrow sacred!

ORGAR.

Fear not, Virgins;
Her peace is my best care, and to ensure it,
I'll haste this instant, by young EDWIN's guidance,
To find the Monarch. Some four miles from Harewood
Stands old Earl EGBERT's castle, my fast friend.
With him will I persuade the King to sojourn,
'Till my child's grief abate; that too to speed
Be it your business, Virgins: Watching ever

Each happy interval, when your soft tongues
May hint his praises, 'till by practice won
She bear their fuller blazon. ELFRID's welfare
Requires this friendly office at your hands;
And EDGAR's virtues bear such genuine lustre,
That truth itself directs—— [*Exit Orgar.*

SEMICHORUS.

As Truth directs,
So only shall we act. This day is shewn
What dire effects await its violation.
Straight is the road of Truth, and plain;
And though across the sacred way
Ten thousand erring footsteps stray,
'Tis ours to walk direct,
And with sage caution circumspect,
Pace slowly through the solemn scene.

[*The principal Virgin returns.*

SEMICHORUS.

Has ORGAR left the grove?

SEMICHORUS.

He has, my Sister.

SEMICHORUS.

Then hear, and aid ELFRIDA's last resolve,
Who takes the only way stern Fate has left
To save her plighted faith for ever pure
To her dead ATHELWOLD.

SEMICHORUS.

Forbid it, Patience,

Forbid it, that submissive calm of soul,
Which teaches meek-ey'd Piety to smile
Beneath the scourge of Heav'n.

SEMICHORUS.

Ye need not fear it,
She means not self-destruction. Thanks to Heav'n,
Huge and o'er-bearing as her mis'ry is,
It cannot so oblit'rate from her breast
The deep-grav'd rule of duty. Her pure soul
Means, on the instant, to devote itself
To Heav'n and holiness. Assist her straight,
Lest EDGAR's presence, and her Father's rage
Prevent the blest intention. See, she comes.
Kneel on each side, devoutly kneel around her:
And breathe some pray'r in high and solemn strains,
That Angels from their thrones of light may hear,
And ratify her vow.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

[*Elfrida kneels, and the Virgins divide into two Troops.*

SEMICHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of light;
And O! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

ELFRIDA.

Hear first, that ATHELWOLD's sad Widow swears
To rear a hallow'd convent o'er the place,
Where stream'd his blood: there will she weep thro' life
Immur'd with this chaste throng of Virgins; there
Each day shall six times hear her full-voic'd choir
Chant the slow requiem o'er her martyr'd Lord;
There too, when midnight low'rs with awful gloom,
She'll rise observant of the stated call
Of waking Grief, bear the dim livid taper
Along the winding isles, and at the altar
Kiss ev'ry pale shrine with her trembling lips,
Press the cold stone with her bent knee, and call
On sainted ATHELWOLD.

SEMICHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of light;
And O! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

ELFRIDA.

Hear next, that ATHELWOLD's sad Widow swears
Never to violate the holy vow
She to his truth first plighted; swears to bear
The sober singleness of widowhood

To her cold grave. If from this chaste resolve
She ev'n in thought should swerve; if gaudy pomp,
Or flatt'ring greatness e'er should tempt one wish
To stray beyond this purpose; may that Heav'n,
Which hears this vow, punish its violation,
As heav'nly justice ought.

CHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of light;
And O! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

CARACTACUS:

WRITTEN ON THE MODEL

OF THE

ANCIENT GREEK TRAGEDY.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE YEAR 1759.

Nos munera Phœbo
Misimus; et lectas Druidum de gente Choreas.

Milton.

THE ARGUMENT.

Caractacus, King of the Silures, having been defeated by Ostorius, the Roman Præfect, his queen taken prisoner, and his son (as it is supposed) either slain or fled, retired with his only daughter, and took sanctuary amongst the Druids in Mona. Ostorius, after the battle, leaving garrisons in the conquered country, marched to subdue the northern part of Britain, and led his troops to the frontiers of the Brigantes, then governed by Cartismandua. This queen, dreading the victorious enemy, made a truce with him; one of the conditions of which was, that she should assist the Romans in securing the British king, that he might be carried to Rome to grace the triumph of Claudius. She accordingly gave up her two sons as hostages, to be sent themselves to Rome, in case they did not seduce Caractacus from his sanctuary, to which place they were to be accompanied by Aulus Didius, and a sufficient force, to effect that design.

The Drama opens on their arrival in the consecrated grove, a little before midnight, and about the time when the Druids, who form the Chorus, were preparing the ceremonial of Caractacus's admission into their order. The two princes are seized as spies; and the incidents, consequent upon this, form what is called the Episode of the piece. The Exode, or Catastrophe, is prepared by the coming of Arviragus the king's son, who, having escaped with life in the late battle, had employed the intermediate time in privately collecting his father's scattered forces, to put him again into a condition of facing the enemy. His bravery, in defending his father and the Druids, occasions the Peripetia, or change of fortune; and his death, with the final captivity of Caractacus, concludes the Tragedy.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

AULUS DIDIUS, the Roman General.

VELLINUS, } Sons of CARTISMANDUA.
ELIDURUS, }

CHORUS, of DRUIDS and BARDS.*

CARACTACUS.

EVELINA, Daughter to CARACTACUS.

ARVIRAGUS, Son to CARACTACUS.

SCENE, MONA.

* The Dramatic part of the Chorus is supposed to be chiefly spoken by the principal Druid; the Lyrical part sung by the Bards.

CARACTACUS;

A

DRAMATIC POEM.

AULUS DIDIUS with Romans.

THIS is the secret centre of the isle:
Here, Romans, pause, and let the eye of wonder
Gaze on the solemn scene: behold yon oak,
How stern he frowns, and with his broad brown arms
Chills the pale plain beneath him: mark yon altar,
The dark stream brawling round its rugged base,
These cliffs, these yawning caverns, this wide circus,
Skirted with unhewn stone: they awe my soul,
As if the very Genius of the place
Himself appear'd, and with terrific tread
Stalk'd through his drear domain. And yet, my friends,
(If shapes like his be but the fancy's coinage)
Surely there is a hidden power, that reigns
'Mid the lone majesty of untam'd nature,
Controlling sober reason; tell me else,
Why do these haunts of barb'rous superstition
O'ercome me thus? I scorn them, yet they awe me.

Call forth the British princes; in this gloom
I mean to school them to our enterprise.

[*Enter Vellinus and Elidurus.*

AULUS DIDIUS, VELLINUS, ELIDURUS.

Ye pledges dear of CARTISMANDUA's faith,
Approach! and to mine uninstructed ear
Explain this scene of horror.

ELIDURUS.

Daring Roman,
Know that thou stand'st on consecrated ground;
These mighty piles of magic-planted rock,
Thus rang'd in mystic order, mark the place
Where but at times of holiest festival
The Druid leads his train.

AULUS DIDIUS.

Where dwells the seer?

VELLINUS.

In yonder shaggy cave: on which the moon
Now sheds a side-long gleam. His brotherhood
Possess the neighb'ring cliffs.

AULUS DIDIUS.

Yet up the hill
Mine eye descries a distant range of caves,
Delv'd in the ridges of the craggy steep:
And this way still another.

ELIDURUS.

On the left

Reside the Sages skill'd in Nature's lore:
The changeful universe, its numbers, powers,
Studious they measure, save when meditation
Gives place to holy rites: then in the grove
Each hath his rank and function. Yonder grots
Are tenanted by Bards, who nightly thence,
Rob'd in their flowing vests of innocent white,
Descend, with harps that glitter to the moon,
Hymning immortal strains. The spirits of air,
Of earth, of water, nay of heav'n itself,
Do listen to their lay; and oft, 'tis said,
In visible shapes dance they a magic round
To the high minstrelsy. Now, if thine eye
Be sated with the view, haste to thy ships;
And ply thine oars; for, if the Druids learn
This bold intrusion, thou wilt find it hard
To foil their fury.

AULUS DIDIUS.

Prince, I did not moor
My light-arm'd shallops on this dangerous strand
To sooth a fruitless curiosity:
I come in quest of proud CARACTACUS;
Who, when our veterans put his troops to flight,
Found refuge here.

ELIDURUS.

If here the Monarch rests,
Presumptuous Chief! thou might'st as well essay
To pluck him from yon stars: Earth's ample range

Contains no surer refuge: underneath
The soil we tread, a hundred secret paths,
Scoop'd through the living rock in winding maze,
Lead to as many caverns, dark, and deep:
In which the hoary sages act their rites
Mysterious, rites of such strange potency,
As, done in open day, would dim the sun,
Though thron'd in noontide brightness. In such dens
He may for life lie hid.

AULUS DIDIUS.

We know the task
Most difficult: yet has thy royal mother
Furnish'd the means.

ELIDURUS.

My mother, say'st thou, Roman?

AULUS DIDIUS.

In proof of that firm faith she lends to Rome,
She gave you up her honour's hostages.

ELIDURUS.

She did: and we submit.

AULUS DIDIUS.

To Rome we bear you;
From your dear country bear you; from your joys,
Your loves, your friendships, all your souls hold precious.

ELIDURUS.

And dost thou taunt us, Roman, with our fate?

AULUS DIDIUS.

No, youth, by heav'n, I would avert that fate.
Wish ye for liberty?

VELLINUS, ELIDURUS.

More than for life.

AULUS DIDIUS.

And would do much to gain it?

VELLINUS.

Name the task.

AULUS DIDIUS.

The task is easy. Haste ye to these Druids:
Tell them ye come, commission'd by your Queen,
To seek the great CARACTACUS; and call
His valour to her aid, against the Legions,
Which, led by our OSTORIUS, now assail
Her frontiers. The late treaty she has seal'd
Is yet unknown: and this her royal signet,
Which more to mask our purpose was obtain'd,
Shall be your pledge of faith. The eager king
Will gladly take the charge; and, he consenting,
What else remains, but to the Menaï's shore
Ye lead his credulous step? there will we seize him;
Bear him to Rome, the substitute for you,
And give you back to freedom.

VELLINUS.

If the Druids—

AULUS DIDIUS.

If they, or he, prevent this artifice,
Then force must take its way: then flaming brands,

And biting axes, wielded by our soldiers,
Must level these thick shades, and so unlodge
The lurking savage.

ELIDURUS.

Gods, shall Mona perish?

AULUS DIDIUS.

Princes, her ev'ry trunk shall on the ground
Stretch its gigantic length; unless, ere dawn,
Ye lure this untam'd lion to our toils.
Go then, and prosper; I shall to the ships,
And there expect his coming. Youths, remember,
He must to Rome to grace great CÆSAR's triumph:
CÆSAR and Fate demand him at your hand.

[*Exeunt Aulus Didius and Romans.*

ELIDURUS, VELLINUS.

ELIDURUS.

And will Heav'n suffer it? Will the just gods,
That tread yon spangled pavement o'er our heads,
Look from their sky and yield him? Will these Druids,
Their sage vicegerents, not call down the thunder?
And will not instant its hot bolts be darted
In such a righteous cause? Yes, good old King,
Yes, last of Britons, thou art Heav'n's own pledge:
And shalt be such till death.

VELLINUS.

What means my brother?
Dost thou refuse the charge?

ELIDURUS.

Dost thou accept it?

VELLINUS.

It gives us liberty.

ELIDURUS.

It makes us traitors.

Gods, would VELLINUS do a deed of baseness?

VELLINUS.

Will ELIDURUS scorn the proffer'd boon
Of freedom?

ELIDURUS.

Yes! when such its guilty price,
Brother, I spurn it.

VELLINUS.

Go then, foolish boy!
I'll do the deed myself.

ELIDURUS.

It shall not be:
I will proclaim the fraud.

VELLINUS.

Wilt thou? 'tis well.
Hie to yon cave; call loudly on the Druid;
And bid him drag to ignominious death
The partner of thy blood. Yet hope not thou
To 'scape; for thou didst join my impious steps:
Therefore his wrath shall curse thee: thou shalt live;
Yet shalt thou live an interdicted wretch,
All rights of nature cancell'd.

ELIDURUS.

Oh VELLINUS!

Rend not my soul: by Heav'n thou know'st I love thee,
As fervently as brother e'er lov'd brother,
And, loving thee, I thought I lov'd mine honour.
Ah! do not wake, dear youth, in this true breast
So fierce a conflict.

VELLINUS.

Honour's voice commands
Thou should'st obey thy mother, and thy queen.
Honour and Holiness alike conspire
To bid thee save these consecrated groves
From Roman devastation.

ELIDURUS.

Horrid thought!
Hence let us haste, ev'n to the farthest nook
Of this wide isle; nor view the sacrilege.

VELLINUS,

No, let us stay, and by our prosperous art
Prevent the sacrilege. Mark me, my brother;
More years and more experience have matur'd
My sober thought: I will convince thy youth,
That this our deed has ev'ry honest sanction
Cool reason may demand.

ELIDURUS.

To Rome with reason;
Try if 'twill bring her deluging ambition
Into the level course of right and justice:

Try if 'twill tame these insolent invaders;
Who thus, in savageness of conquest, claim
Whom chance of war has spar'd. Do this, and prosper.
But, pray thee, do not reason from my soul
Its inbred honesty: that holy flame,
Howe'er eclips'd by Rome's black influence
In vulgar minds, ought still to brighten ours.

VELLINUS.

Vain talker, leave me.

ELIDURUS.

No, I will not leave thee:
I must not, dare not, in these perilous shades.
Think, if thy fraud should fail, these holy men,
How will their justice rend thy trait'rous limbs?
If thou succeed'st, the fiercer pangs of conscience,
How will they ever goad thy guilty soul?
Mercy defend us! see, the awful Druids
Are issuing from their caves: hear'st thou yon signal?
Lo, on the instant all the mountain whitens
With slow-descending bards. Retire, retire;
This is the hour of sacrifice: to stay
Is death.

VELLINUS.

I'll wait the closing of their rites
In yonder vale: do thou, as likes thee best,
Betray, or aid me.

ELIDURUS.

To betray thee, youth,
That love forbids; honour, alas! to aid thee. [*Exeunt.*

Enter CHORUS.

SEMICHORUS.

Sleep and silence reign around;
Not a night-breeze wakes to blow:
Circle, sons, this holy ground;
Circle close, in triple row.
And, if mask'd in vapours drear,
Any earth-born spirit dare
To hover round this sacred space,
Haste with light spells the murky foe to chase.
Lift your boughs of vervain blue,
Dipt in cold September dew;
And dash the moisture chaste, and clear,
O'er the ground, and through the air,
Now the place is purg'd and pure.
Brethren! say, for this high hour
Are the milk-white steers prepar'd,
Whose necks the rude yoke never scar'd,
To the furrow yet unbroke?
For such must bleed beneath yon oak.

SEMICHORUS.

Druid, these, in order meet,
Are all prepar'd.

SEMICHORUS.

But tell me yet,
CADWALL! did thy step profound
Dive into the cavern deep,
Twice twelve fathom under ground,
Where our sage fore-fathers sleep?

Thence with reverence hast thou born,
From the consecrated chest,
The golden sickle, scrip, and vest,
Whilom by old BELINUS worn?

SEMICHORUS.

Druid, these, in order meet,
Are all prepar'd.

SEMICHORUS.

But tell me yet,
From the grot of charms and spells,
Where our matron sister dwells,
BRENNUS! has thy holy hand
Safely brought the Druid wand?
And the potent adder-stone,
Gender'd 'fore th' autumnal moon?
When, in undulating twine,
The foaming snakes prolific join;
When they hiss, and when they bear
Their wond'rous egg aloof in air;
Thence, before to earth it fall,
The Druid, in his hallow'd pall,
Receives the prize;
And instant flies,
Follow'd by th' envenom'd brood,
'Till he cross the chrystal flood.

SEMICHORUS.

Druid, these, in order meet,
Are all prepar'd.

SEMICHORUS.

Then all's complete.
And now let nine of the selected band,
Whose greener years befit such station best,
With wary circuit pace around the grove:
And guard each inlet; watchful, lest the eye
Of busy curiosity profane
Pry on our rites: which now must be as close
As done i' th' very central womb of earth.
Occasion claims it; for CARACTACUS
This night demands admission to our train.
He, once our king, while aught his power avail'd
To save his country from the rod of tyrants,
That duty past, does wisely now retire
To end his days in secrecy and peace;
Druid with Druids, in this chief of groves,
Ev'n in the heart of Mona. See, he comes!
How awful is his port! mark him, my friends!
He looks, as doth the tower, whose nodding walls,
After the conflict of Heav'n's angry bolts,
Frown with a dignity unmark'd before,
Ev'n in its prime of strength. Health to the King!

CARACTACUS, EVELINA, CHORUS.

CARACTACUS.

This holy place, methinks, doth this night wear
More than its wonted gloom: Druid, these groves
Have caught the dismal colouring of my soul,

Changing their dark dun garbs to very sable,
In pity to their guest. Hail, hallow'd oaks!
Hail, British born! who, last of British race,
Hold your primæval rights by nature's charter;
Not at the nod of CÆSAR. Happy foresters,
Ye wave your bold heads in the liberal air;
Nor ask, for privilege, a prætor's edict.
Ye, with your tough and intertwisted roots,
Grasp the firm rocks ye sprung from; and, erect
In knotty hardihood, still proudly spread
Your leafy banners 'gainst the tyrannous north,
Who, Roman-like, assails you. Tell me, Druid,
Is it not better to be such as these,
Than be the thing I am?

CHORUS.

To be the thing
Eternal Wisdom wills, is ever best.

CARACTACUS.

But I am lost to that predestin'd use
Eternal Wisdom will'd, and fitly therefore
May wish a change of being. I was born
A king; and Heav'n, who bade these warrior oaks
Lift their green shields against the fiery sun,
To fence their subject plain, did mean, that I
Should, with as firm an arm, protect my people
Against the pestilent glare of Rome's ambition.
I fail'd; and how I fail'd, thou know'st too well;

So does the babbling world: and therefore, Druid,
I would be any thing save what I am.

CHORUS.

See, to thy wish, the holy rites prepar'd,
Which, if Heav'n frown not, consecrate thee Druid.
See to the altar's base the victims led,
From whose free-gushing blood ourself shall read
Its high behests; which if assenting found,
These hands around thy chosen limbs shall wrap
The vest of sanctity; while at the act,
Yon white-rob'd bards, sweeping their solemn harps,
Shall lift their choral warblings to the skies,
And call the gods to witness. Mean while, Prince,
Bethink thee well, if aught on this vain earth
Still holds too firm an union with thy soul,
Estranging it from peace.

CARACTACUS.

I had a queen:
Bear with my weakness, Druid! this tough breast
Must heave a sigh, for she is unreveng'd.
And can I taste true peace, she unreveng'd?
So chaste, so lov'd a queen? Ah, EVELINA!
Hang not thus weeping on the feeble arm
That could not save thy mother.

EVELINA.

To hang thus
Softens the pang of grief; and the sweet thought,
That a fond father still supports his child,

Sheds, on my pensive mind, such soothing balm,
As doth the blessing of these pious seers,
When most they wish our welfare. Would to Heav'n
A daughter's presence could as much avail,
To ease her father's woes, as his doth mine.

CARACTACUS.

Ever most gentle! come unto my bosom:
Dear pattern of the precious prize I lost,
Lost, so inglorious lost;—my friends, these eyes
Did see her torn from my defenceless camp;
Whilst I, hemm'd round by squadrons, could not save her:
My boy, still nearer to the darling pledge,
Beheld her shrieking in the ruffian's arm;
Beheld, and fled.

EVELINA.

Ah! Sir, forbear to wound
My brother's fame; he fled, but to recall
His scatter'd forces to pursue and save her.

CARACTACUS.

Daughter, he fled. Now, by yon gracious moon,
That rising saw the deed, and instant hid
Her blushing face in twilight's dusky veil,
The flight was parricide.

EVELINA.

Indeed, indeed,
I know him valiant; and not doubt he fell
'Mid slaughter'd thousands of the haughty foe,
Victim to filial love. ARVIRAGUS!

Thou hadst no sister near the bloody field,
Whose sorrowing search, led by yon orb of night,
Might find thy body; wash with tears thy wounds;
And wipe them with her hair.

CHORUS.

Peace, Virgin, peace:
Nor thou, sad prince, reply; whate'er he is,
Be he a captive, fugitive, or corse,
He is what Heav'n ordain'd: these holy groves
Permit no exclamation 'gainst Heav'n's will
To violate their echoes: Patience here,
Her meek hands folded on her modest breast,
In mute submission lifts th' adoring eye,
Ev'n to the storm that wrecks her.

EVELINA.

Holy Druid,
If aught my erring tongue has said pollutes
This sacred place, I from my soul abjure it;
And will these lips bar with eternal silence,
Rather than speak a word, or act a deed
Unmeet for thy sage daughters; blessing first
This hallow'd hour, that takes me from the world,
And joins me to their sober sisterhood.

CHORUS.

'Tis wisely said. See, Prince, this prudent maid,
Now, while the ruddy flame of sparkling youth
Glows on her beauteous cheek, can quit the world
Without a sigh, whilst thou——

CARACTACUS.

Would save my queen
From a base ravisher; would wish to plunge
This falchion in his breast, and so avenge
Insulted royalty. Oh holy men!
Ye are the sons of piety and peace;
Ye never felt the sharp vindictive spur,
That goads the injur'd warrior; the hot tide,
That flushes crimson on the conscious cheek
Of him, who burns for glory; else indeed
Ye much would pity me: would curse the fate
That coops me here inactive in your groves,
Robs me of hope, tells me this trusty steel
Must never cleave one Roman helm again:
Never avenge my queen, nor free my country.

CHORUS.

'Tis Heav'n's high will——

CARACTACUS.

I know it, reverend fathers!
'Tis Heav'n's high will, that these poor aged eyes
Shall never more behold that virtuous woman,
To whom my youth was constant; 'twas Heav'n's will
To take her from me at that very hour,
When best her love might sooth me; that black hour,
(May Memory ever raze it from her records)
When all my squadrons fled, and left their king
Old and defenceless: him, who nine whole years
Had taught them how to conquer: Yes, my friends,

For nine whole years against the sons of rapine
I led my veterans, oft to victory,
Never 'till then to shame. Bear with me, Druid;
I've done: begin the rites.

CHORUS.

Oh would to Heav'n
A frame of mind, more fitted to these rites,
Possest thee, Prince! that Resignation meek,
That dove-ey'd Peace, handmaid of Sanctity,
Approach'd this altar with thee: 'stead of these,
See I not gaunt Revenge, ensanguin'd Slaughter,
And mad Ambition, clinging to thy soul,
Eager to snatch thee back to their domain,
Back to a vain and miserable world;
Whose misery, and vanity, though try'd,
Thou still hold'st dearer than these solemn shades,
Where Quiet reigns with Virtue? Try we yet
What Holiness can do! for much it can:
Much is the potency of pious prayer:
And much the sacred influence convey'd
By sage mysterious office: when the soul,
Snatch'd by the power of music from her cell
Of fleshly thraldom, feels herself upborn
On plumes of ecstasy, and boldly springs,
'Mid swelling harmonies and pealing hymns,
Up to the porch of heav'n. Strike, then, ye Bards!
Strike all your strings symphonious; wake a strain
May penetrate, may purge, may purify,

His yet unhallow'd bosom; call ye hither
The airy tribe, that on yon mountain dwell,
Ev'n on majestic Snowdon; they, who never
Deign visit mortal men, save on some cause
Of highest import, but, sublimely shrin'd
On its hoar top in domes of crystalline ice,
Hold converse with those spirits, that possess
The skies' pure sapphire, nearest heav'n itself.

ODE.

I. 1.

Mona on Snowdon calls:
Hear, thou king of mountains, hear;
Hark, she speaks from all her strings;
Hark, her loudest echo rings;
King of mountains, bend thine ear:
Send thy spirits, send them soon,
Now, when midnight and the moon
Meet upon thy front of snow:
See, their gold and ebon rod,
Where the sober sisters nod,
And greet in whispers sage and slow.
Snowdon mark! 'tis Magic's hour;
Now the mutter'd spell hath power;
Power to rend thy ribs of rock,
And burst thy base with thunder's shock:
But to thee no ruder spell
Shall Mona use, than those that dwell

In music's secret cells, and lie
Steep'd in the stream of harmony.

I. 2.

Snowdon has heard the strain:
Hark, amid the wond'ring grove
Other harpings answer clear,
Other voices meet our ear,
Pinions flutter, shadows move,
Busy murmurs hum around,
Rustling vestments brush the ground;
Round, and round, and round they go,
Through the twilight, through the shade,
Mount the oak's majestic head,
And gild the tufted misletoe.
Cease, ye glitt'ring race of light,
Close your wings, and check your flight:
Here, arrang'd in order due,
Spread your robes of saffron hue;
For lo, with more than mortal fire,
Mighty MADOR smites the lyre:
Hark, he sweeps the master-strings;
Listen all——

CHORUS.

Break off; a sullen smoke involves the altar;
The central oak doth shake; I hear the sound
Of steps profane: CARACTACUS, retire;
Bear hence the victims; Mona is polluted.

SEMICHORUS.

Father, as we did watch the eastern side,
We spied and instant seiz'd two stranger youths,
Who, in the bottom of a shadowy dell,
Held earnest converse: Britons do they seem,
And of Brigantian race.

CHORUS.

Haste, drag them hither.

VELLINUS, ELIDURUS, CHORUS.

ELIDURUS.

Oh spare, ye sage and venerable Druids!
Your countrymen and sons.

CHORUS.

And are ye Britons?
Unheard of profanation! Rome herself,
Ev'n impious Rome, whom conquest makes more impious,
Would not have dar'd so rashly. Oh! for words,
Big with the fiercest force of execration,
To blast the deed, and doers.

ELIDURUS.

Spare the curse,
Oh spare our youth!

CHORUS.

Is it not now the hour,
The holy hour, when to the cloudless height
Of yon starr'd concave climbs the full-orb'd moon,
And to this nether world in solemn stillness

Gives sign, that to the list'ning ear of Heav'n
Religion's voice should plead? The very babe
Knows this, and, 'chance awak'd, his little hands
Lifts to the gods, and on his innocent couch
Calls down a blessing. Shall your manly years
Plead ignorance, and impiously presume
To tread, with vile unconsecrated feet,
On Mona's hallow'd plain? know, wretches, know,
At any hour such boldness is a crime,
At this 'tis sacrilege.

VELLINUS.

Were Mona's plain
More hallow'd still, hallow'd as is Heav'n's self,
The cause might plead our pardon.

ELIDURUS.

Mighty Druid!
True, we have rashly dar'd, yet forc'd by duty,
Our sov'reign's mandate——

VELLINUS.

Elder by my birth,
Brother, I claim, in right of eldership,
To open our high embassy.

CHORUS.

Speak then;
But see thy words answer in honest weight
To this proud prelude. Youth! they must be weighty,
T' atone for such a crime.

VELLINUS.

If then to give
New nerves to vanquish'd valour; if to do,
What, with the blessing of the gods, may save
A bleeding country from oppression's sword,
Be weighty business, know, on our commission,
And on its hop'd success, that weight depends.

CHORUS.

Declare it then at once, briefly and boldly.

VELLINUS.

Caractacus is here.

CHORUS.

Say'st thou, proud boy?
'Tis boldly said, and, grant 'twere truly said,
Think'st thou he were not here from fraud or force
As safe, as in a camp of conquerors?
Here, youth, he would be guarded by the gods;
Their own high hostage; and each sacred hair
Of his selected head, would in these caverns
Sleep with the unsunn'd silver of the mine,
As precious and as safe; record the time,
When Mona e'er betray'd the hapless wretch,
That made her groves his refuge.

VELLINUS.

Holy Druid!
Think not so harshly of our enterprise.
Can force, alas! dwell in our unarm'd hands?
Can fraud in our young bosoms? No, dread Seer!

Our business told, I trust thou'lt soon disclaim
The vain suspicion; and thy holy ear
(Be brave CARACTACUS or here or absent)
Shall instant learn it. From the north we come;
The sons of her, whose Heav'n-intrusted sway
Blesses the bold Brigantes; men who firmly
Have three long moons withstood those Roman powers
Which, led by fell OSTORIUS, still assail
Our frontiers: yet so oft have our stout swords
Repell'd their hot assault, that now, like falcons,
They hang suspended, loth to quit their prey,
Nor daring yet to seize it. Such the state
Of us and Rome; in which our prudent mother,
Revolving what might best secure her country
From this impending ruin, gave us charge
To seek the great CARACTACUS, and call
His valour to her aid, to lead her bands,
To fight the cause of liberty and Britain,
And quell these ravagers.

[*Caractacus starts from behind the altar.*

CARACTACUS, VELLINUS, ELIDURUS, CHORUS.

CARACTACUS.

And ye have found me;
Friends, ye have found me: lead me to your queen,
And the last purple drop in these old veins
Shall fall for her and Britain.

CHORUS.

Rash, rash Prince!

VELLINUS.

Ye blest immortal Powers! is this the man,
The more than man, who for nine bloody years
Withstood all Rome? He is; that warlike front,
Seam'd o'er with honest scars, proclaims he is:
Kneel, brother, kneel, while in his royal hand
We lodge the signet: this, in pledge of faith,
Great CARTISMANDUA sends, and with it tells thee
She has a nobler pledge than this behind;
Thy Queen——

CARACTACUS.

GUIDERIA!

VELLINUS.

Safely with our mother.

CARACTACUS.

How, when, where rescu'd? mighty gods, I thank ye;
For it is true; this signet speaks it true.
Oh tell me briefly.

VELLINUS.

In a sally, Prince,
Which, wanting abler chiefs, my gracious mother
Committed to my charge, our troops assail'd
One outwork of the camp; the mask of night
Favour'd our arms, and there my happy hand
Was doom'd with other prisoners to release
The captive matron.

CARACTACUS.

Let me clasp thee, youth,
And thou shalt be my son: I had one, stranger,
Just of thy years; he look'd like thee right honest;
Had just that freeborn boldness on his brow,
And yet he fail'd me. Were it not for him,
Who, as thou seest, ev'n at this hour of joy,
Draws tears down mine old cheek, I were as blest
As the great gods. Oh, he has all disgrac'd
His high-born ancestry! But I'll forget him.
Haste, EVELINA, barb my knotty spear,
Bind fast this trusty falchion to my thigh,
My bow, my target——

CHORUS.

Rash CARACTACUS!
What hast thou done? What dost thou mean to do?

CARACTACUS.

To save my country.

CHORUS.

To betray thyself.
That thou hast done; the rest thou can'st not do,
If Heav'n forbids; and of its awful will
Thy fury recks not: Has the bleeding victim
Pour'd a propitious stream? The milk-white steeds
Unrein'd and neighing pranc'd with fav'ring steps?
Say, when these youths approach'd, did not a gust
Of livid smoke involve the bickering flame?
Did not the forest tremble? Every omen

Led thee to doubt their honesty of purpose;
And yet, before their tongues could tell that purpose,
Ere I had tender'd, as our laws ordain,
Their test of faith, thy rudeness rush'd before me,
Infringing my just rights.

CARACTACUS.

Druid, methinks,
At such a time, in such a cause, Reproof
Might 'bate its sternness. Now, by Heav'n, I feel,
Beyond all omens, that within my breast,
Which marshals me to conquest; something here
That snatches me beyond all mortal fears,
Lifts me to where upon her jasper throne
Sits flame-rob'd Victory, who calls me son,
And crowns me with a palm, whose deathless green
Shall bloom when CÆSAR's fades.

CHORUS.

Vain confidence!

CARACTACUS.

Yet I submit in all——

CHORUS.

'Tis meet thou should'st.
Thou art a King, a sov'reign o'er frail man;
I am a Druid, servant of the gods;
Such service is above such sov'reignty,
As well thou know'st: if they should prompt these lips
To interdict the thing thou dar'st to do,
What would avail thy daring!

CARACTACUS.

Holy man!

But thou wilt bless it; Heav'n will bid thee bless it;
Thou know'st that, when we fight to save our country,
We fight the cause of Heav'n. The man that falls,
Falls hallow'd; falls a victim for the gods;
For them and for their altars.

CHORUS.

Valiant Prince!

Think not we lightly rate our country's weal,
Or thee, our country's champion: Well we know
The glorious meed of those exalted souls,
Who flame like thee for freedom: Mark me, Prince!
The time will come, when Destiny and Death,
Thron'd in a burning car, the thund'ring wheels
Arm'd with gigantic scythes of adamant
Shall scour this field of life: and in the rear
The fiend Oblivion: kingdoms, empires, worlds
Melt in the general blaze: when, lo, from high
Andraste darting, catches from the wreck
The roll of fame, claps her ascending plumes,
And stamps on orient stars each patriot name,
Round her eternal dome.

CARACTACUS.

Speak ever thus,

And I will hear thee, 'till attention faint
In heedless ecstasy.

CHORUS.

This though we know,
Let man beware with headlong zeal to rush
Where slaughter calls; it is not courage, Prince,
No, nor the pride and practis'd skill in arms,
That gains this meed: the warrior is no patriot,
Save when, obsequious to the will of Heav'n,
He draws the sword of vengeance.

CARACTACUS.

Surely, Druid,
Such fair occasion speaks the will of Heav'n——

CHORUS.

Monarch, perchance thou hast a fair occasion;
But, if thou hast, the gods will soon declare it:
Their sov'reign will thou know'st not; this to learn
Demands our search. Ye mortals all retire!
Leave ye the grove to us and Inspiration;
Nor let a step, or ev'n one glance profane,
Steal from your caverns: stay, my holy brethren,
Ye time-ennobled Seers, whose rev'rend brows
Full eighty winters whiten; you, ye Bards,
Leoline, Cadwall, Hoel, Cantaber,
Attend upon our slumbers: Wond'rous men,
Ye, whose skill'd fingers know how best to lead,
Through all the maze of sound, the wayward step
Of Harmony, recalling oft, and oft
Permitting her unbridled course to rush
Through dissonance to concord, sweetest then

Ev'n when expected harshest. MADOR, thou
Alone shalt lift thy voice; no choral peal
Shall drown thy solemn warblings; thou best know'st
That opiate charm which lulls corporeal sense:
Thou hast the key, great Bard! that best can ope
The portal of the soul; unlock it straight,
And lead the pensive pilgrim on her way,
Through the vast regions of futurity.

[*Exeunt Caractacus, Vellinus, &c.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. 1.

Hail, thou harp of Phrygian fame!
In years of yore that Camber bore
From Troy's sepulchral flame;
With ancient BRUTE, to Britain's shore
The mighty minstrel came:
Sublime upon the burnish'd prow,
He bad thy manly modes to flow;
Britain heard the descant bold,
She flung her white arms o'er the sea;
Proud in her leafy bosom to enfold
The freight of harmony.

I. 2.

Mute 'till then was ev'ry plain,
Save where the flood o'er mountains rude

Tumbled his tide amain:
And Echo from th' impending wood
Resounded the hoarse strain;
While from the north the sullen gale
With hollow whistlings shook the vale;
Dismal notes, and answer'd soon
By savage howl the heaths among,
What time the wolf doth bay the trembling moon,
And thin the bleating throng.

I. 3.

Thou spak'st, imperial Lyre,
The loud roar ceas'd, and airs from high
Lapt the land in ecstasy:
Fancy, the fairy, with thee came;
And Inspiration, bright-ey'd dame,
Oft at thy call would leave her sapphire sky;
And, if not vain the verse presumes,
Ev'n now some chaste divinity is near:
For lo! the sound of distant plumes
Pants through the pathless desert of the air.
'Tis not the flight of her;
'Tis Sleep, her dewy harbinger;
Change, my harp, Oh change thy measures;
Cull, from thy mellifluous treasures,
Notes that steal on even feet,
Ever slow, yet never pausing,
Mixt with many a warble sweet,
In a ling'ring cadence closing,

While the pleas'd Power sinks gently down the skies,
And seals with hand of down the Druid's slumb'ring eyes.

II. 1.

Thrice I pause, and thrice I sound
The central string, and now I ring
(By measur'd lore profound)
A sevenfold chime, and sweep and swing
Above, below, around,
To mix thy music with the spheres,
That warble to immortal ears.
Inspiration hears the call:
She rises from her throne above,
And sudden as the glancing meteors fall,
She comes, she fills the grove.

II. 2.

High her port; her waving hand
A pencil bears; the days, the years,
Arise at her command,
And each obedient colouring wears.
Lo, where Time's pictur'd band
In hues ethereal glide along:
Oh mark the transitory throng;
Now they dazzle, now they die,
Instant they flit from light to shade,
Mark the blue forms of faint futurity,
Oh mark them ere they fade.

II. 3.

Whence was that inward groan?
Why bursts through closed lids the tear?
Why uplifts the bristling hair
Its white and venerable shade?
Why down the consecrated head
Courses in chilly drops the dew of fear?
All is not well, the pale-ey'd moon
Curtains her head in clouds, the stars retire,
Save from the sultry south alone
The swart star flings his pestilential fire;
Ev'n Sleep herself will fly,
If not recall'd by Harmony.
Wake, my lyre! thy softest numbers,
Such as nurse ecstatic slumbers,
Sweet as tranquil virtue feels
When the toil of life is ending,
While from the earth the spirit steals,
And, on new-born plumes ascending,
Hastens to lave in the bright fount of day,
'Till Destiny prepare a shrine of purer clay.

[*The Druid waking, speaks.*

CHORUS.

It may not be. Avaunt, terrific axe!
Why hangs thy bright edge glaring o'er the grove?
Oh for a giant's nerve to ward the stroke!
It bows, it falls.
Where am I? hush, my soul!

'Twas all a dream. Resume no more the strain:
The hour is past: my brethren! what ye saw,
(If what ye saw, as by your looks I read;
Bore like ill-omen'd shape) hold it in silence.
The midnight air falls chilly on my breast;
And now I shiver, now a feverish glow
Scorches my vitals. Hark, some step approaches.

EVELINA, CHORUS.

EVELINA.

Thus with my wayward fears, to burst unbidden
On yon dread synod, rousing, as ye seem,
From holy trance, appears a desperate deed,
Ev'n to the wretch who dares it.

CHORUS.

Virgin! quickly
Pronounce the cause,

EVELINA

Bear with a simple maid,
Too prone to fear; perchance my fears are vain.

CHORUS.

But yet declare them.

EVELINA.

I suspect me much
The faith of these Brigantes.

CHORUS.

Say'st thou, Virgin?
Heed what thou say'st; suspicion is a guest

That in the breast of man, of wrathful man,
Too oft' his welcome finds: yet seldom sure
In that submissive calm that smooths the mind
Of maiden innocence.

EVELINA.

I know it well,
Yet must I still distrust the elder stranger:
For while he talks, (and much the flatterer talks)
His brother's silent carriage gives disproof
Of all his boast; indeed I mark'd it well;
And, as my father with the elder held
Bold speech and warlike, as is still his wont
When fir'd with hope of conquest, oft I saw
A sigh unbidden heave the younger's breast,
Half check'd as it was rais'd; sometimes, methought,
His gentle eye would cast a glance on me,
As if he pitied me; and then again
Would fasten on my father, gazing there
To veneration; then he'd sigh again,
Look on the ground, and hang his modest head
Most pensively.

CHORUS.

This may demand, my brethren,
More serious search: Virgin! proceed.

EVELINA.

'Tis true,
My father, rapt in high heroic zeal,
His ev'ry thought big with his country's freedom,

Heeds not the different carriage of these brethren,
The elder takes him wholly; yet methinks,
The younger's manners have I know not what,
That speaks him far more artless. This besides,
Is it not strange, if, as the tale reports,
My mother sojourns with this distant Queen,
She should not send or to my sire, or me,
Some fond remembrance of her love? ah! none,
With tears I speak it, none, not her dear blessing
Has reach'd my longing ears.

CHORUS.

The gods, my brethren,
Have wak'd these doubts in the untainted breast
Of this mild maiden; oft to female softness,
Oft to the purity of virgin souls
Doth Heav'n its voluntary light dispense,
When victims bleed in vain. They must be spies,
Hie thee, good CANTABER, and to our presence
Summon the young Brigantian.

EVELINA.

Do not that,
Or, if ye do, yet treat him nothing sternly:
The softest terms from such a tender breast
Will draw confession, and, if ye shall find
The treason ye suspect, forbear to curse him.
(Not that my weakness means to guide your wisdom)
Yet, as I think he would not wittingly
E'er do a deed of baseness, were it granted

That I might question him, my heart forebodes
It more could gain by gentleness and prayers,
Than will the fiercest threats.

CHORUS.

Perchance it may:
And quickly shalt thou try. But see the King!
And with him both the youths.

EVELINA.

Alas! my fears
Forewent my errand, else had I inform'd thee
That therefore did I come, and from my father,
To gain admission. Mark the younger, Druid!
How sad he seems; oft did he in the cave
So fold his arms——

CHORUS.

We mark him much, and much
The elder's free and dreadless confidence.
Virgin, retire awhile in yonder vale,
Nor, 'till thy royal father quits the grove,
Resume thy station here. [*Exit Evelina.*

CARACTACUS, CHORUS, VELLINUS, ELIDURUS.

CARACTACUS.

Forgive me, Druid!
My eager soul no longer could sustain
The pangs of expectation; hence I sent
The virgin innocence of Evelina,
Safest to break upon your privacy.

She not return'd, Oh pardon, that uncall'd
I follow: the great cause, I trust, absolves me:
'Tis your's, 'tis freedom's, 'tis the cause of Heav'n;
And sure Heav'n owns it such.

CHORUS.

CARACTACUS!

All that by sage and sanctimonious rites
Might of the gods be ask'd, we have essay'd;
And yet, nor to our wish, nor to their wont,
Gave they benign assent.

CARACTACUS.

Death to our hopes!

CHORUS.

While yet we lay in sacred slumber tranc'd,
Sullen and sad to Fancy's frighted eye
Did shapes of dun and murky hue advance,
In train tumultuous, all of gesture strange,
And passing horrible; starting we wak'd,
Yet felt no waking calm; still all was dark,
Still range our tinkling ears with screams of woe.
Suspicious tremors still——

VELLINUS.

Of what suspicious?

Druid, our Queen——

CHORUS.

Restrain thy wayward tongue,
Insolent youth! in such licentious mood

To interrupt our speech ill suits thy years,
And worse our sanctity.

CARACTACUS.

'Tis his distress
Makes him forget, what else his reverent zeal
Would pay ye holily. Think what he feels,
Poor youth! who fears yon moon, before she wanes,
May see his country conquer'd; see his mother
The victor's slave, her royal blood debas'd,
Dragging her chains through the throng'd streets of Rome,
To grace Oppression's triumph. Horrid thought!
Say, can it be that he, whose strenuous youth
Adds vigour to his virtue, e'er can bear
This patiently? He comes to ask my aid,
And, that withheld, (as now he needs must fear)
What means, alas! are left? Search Britain round,
What chief dares cope with Rome? what king but holds
His loan of power at a Proconsul's will,
At best a scepter'd slave?

VELLINUS.

Yes, Monarch, yes,
If Heaven restrain thy formidable sword,
Or to its stroke deny that just success
Which Heav'n alone can give, I fear me much
Our Queen, ourselves, nay Britain's self, must perish.

CARACTACUS.

But is not this a fear makes virtue vain;
Tears from yon minist'ring regents of the sky

Their right? Plucks from firm-handed Providence
The golden reins of sublunary sway,
And gives them to blind Chance: If this be so,
If Tyranny must lord it o'er the earth,
There's Anarchy in heav'n. Nay, frown not, Druid,
I do not think 'tis thus.

CHORUS.

We trust thou do'st not.

CARACTACUS.

Masters of Wisdom! No: my soul confides
In that all-healing and all-forming Power,
Who on the radiant day when Time was born,
Cast his broad eye upon the wild of ocean,
And calm'd it with a glance: then plunging deep
His mighty arm, pluck'd from its dark domain
This throne of freedom, lifted it to light,
Girt it with silver cliffs, and call'd it Britain:
He did, and will preserve it.

CHORUS.

Pious Prince!
In that all-healing and all-forming Power
Still let thy soul confide; but not in men,
No, not in these, ingenuous as they seem,
'Till they are try'd by that high test of faith
Our ancient laws ordain.

VELLINUS.

Illustrious Seer!
Methinks our Sov'reign's signet well might plead

Her envoy's faith. Thy pardon, mighty Druid!
Not for ourselves, but for our Queen we plead;
istrusting us, ye wound her honour.

CHORUS.

Peace;
Our will admits no parley. Thither, Youths,
Turn your astonish'd eyes; behold yon huge
And unhewn sphere of living adamant,
Which, pois'd by magic, rests its central weight
On yonder pointed rock; firm as it seems,
Such is its strange and virtuous property,
It moves obsequious to the gentlest touch
Of him, whose breast is pure; but to a traitor,
Though ev'n a giant's prowess nerv'd his arm,
It stands as fixt as Snowdon. No reply;
The gods command that one of you must now
Approach and try it: in your snowy vests,
Ye Priests, involve the lots, and to the younger,
As is our wont, tender the choice of Fate.

ELIDURUS.

Heav'ns! is it fall'n on me?

CHORUS.

Young Prince, it is:
Prepare thee for thy trial.

ELIDURUS.

Gracious gods!
Who may look up to your tremendous thrones,
And say his breast is pure? All-searching Powers,

Ye know already how and what I am;
And what ye mean to publish me in Mona,
To that I yield and tremble.

CARACTACUS.

Rouse thee, Youth!
And, with that courage honest truth supplies,
(For sure ye both are true) haste to the trial:
Behold I lead thee on.

CHORUS.

Prince, we arrest
Thy hasty step: to witness this high test
Pertains to us alone. A while retire,
And in yon cave his brother be thy charge;
The trial past, again we will confer,
Touching that part which Heav'n's deciding choice
Wills thee to act. [*Exeunt Caractacus and Vellinus.*

CHORUS, ELIDURUS.

CHORUS.

Now be the rites prepar'd:
And now, ye Bards, chant ye that custom'd hymn,
The prelude of this fam'd solemnity.

ODE.

I. 1.

Thou Spirit pure, that spread'st unseen
Thy pinions o'er this pond'rous sphere,
And, breathing through each rigid vein,

Fill'st with stupendous life the marble mass,
And bid'st it bow upon its base,
When sov'reign Truth is near;
Spirit invisible! to thee
We swell the solemn harmony;
Hear us, and aid:
Thou, that in Virtue's cause
O'er-rulest Nature's laws,
Oh hear, and aid with influence high
The sons of Peace and Piety.

I. 2.

First-born of that etherial tribe
Call'd into birth ere time or place,
Whom wave nor wind can circumscribe,
Heirs of the liquid liberty of light,
That float on rainbow pennons bright
Through all the wilds of space;
Yet thou alone of all thy kind
Can'st range the regions of the mind,
Thou only know'st
That dark meand'ring maze,
Where wayward Falsehood strays,
And seizing swift the lurking sprite,
Forces her forth to shame and light.

I. 3.

Thou can'st enter the dark cell
Where the vulture Conscience slumbers,

And, unarm'd by charming spell,
Or magic numbers,
Can'st rouse her from her formidable sleep,
And bid her dart her raging talons deep:
Yet, ah! too seldom doth the furious fiend
Thy bidding wait; vindictive, self-prepar'd,
She knows her torturing time; too sure to rend
The trembling heart, when Virtue quits her guard.
Pause then, celestial guest!
And, brooding on thine adamantine sphere,
If fraud approach, Spirit! that fraud declare;
To Conscience and to Mona leave the rest.

CHORUS.

Heard'st thou the awful invocation, Youth,
Wrapt in those holy harpings?

ELIDURUS.

Sage, I did;
And it came o'er my soul as doth the thunder,
While distant yet, with an expected burst,
It threats the trembling ear. Now to the trial.

CHORUS.

Ere that, bethink thee well what rig'rous doom
Attends thine act; if failing, certain death:
So certain, that in our absolving tongues
Rests not that power may save thee: Thou must die.

EVELINA, ELIDURUS, CHORUS.

EVELINA.

Die, say'st thou? Druid!

ELIDURUS.

Evelina here!

Lead to the rock.

CHORUS.

No, Youth, a while we spare thee;
And, in our stead, permit this royal maiden
To urge thee first with virgin gentleness;
Respect our clemency, and meet her questions
With answers prompt and true; so may'st thou 'scape
A sterner trial.

ELIDURUS.

Rather to the rock.——

EVELINA.

Dost thou disdain me, Prince? Lost as I am,
Methinks the daughter of Caractacus
Might merit milder treatment: I was born
To royal hopes and promise, nurs'd i' th' lap
Of soft prosperity; alas the change!
I meant but to address a few brief words
To this young Prince, and he doth turn his eye,
And scorns to answer me.

ELIDURUS.

Scorn thee, sweet Maid?

No, 'tis the fear——

EVELINA.

And can'st thou fear me, Youth?
Ev'n while I led a life of royalty,
I bore myself to all with meek deportment,

In nothing harsh, or cruel: and, howe'er
Misfortune works upon the minds of men,
(For some, they say, it turns to very stone,)
Mine I am sure it softens. Wert thou guilty,
Yet I should pity thee; nay, wert thou leagued
To load this suffering heart with more misfortunes,
Still should I pity thee; nor e'er believe
Thou would'st, on free and voluntary choice,
Betray the innocent.

ELIDURUS.

Indeed I would not.

EVELINA.

No, gracious Youth, I do believe thou would'st not:
For on thy brow the liberal hand of Heav'n
Has pourtray'd truth as visible and bold,
As were the pictur'd suns that deckt the brows
Of our brave ancestors. Say then, young Prince,
(For therefore have I wish'd to question thee)
Bring ye no token of a mother's fondness
To her expecting child? Gentle thou seem'st,
And sure that gentleness would prompt thine heart
To visit and to sooth with courteous office,
Distress like her's. A captive and a queen
Has more than common claim for pity, Prince,
And ev'n the ills of venerable age
Were cause enough to move thy tender nature.
The tears o'ercharge thine eye. Alas, my fears!
Sickness or sore infirmity had seiz'd her,

Before thou left'st the palace, else her lips
Had to thy care intrusted some kind message,
And blest her hapless daughter by thy tongue.
Would she were here!

ELIDURUS.

Would Heav'n she were!

EVELINA.

Ah why?

ELIDURUS.

Because you wish it.

EVELINA.

Thanks, ingenuous Youth,
For this thy courtesy. Yet, if the Queen
Thy mother shine with such rare qualities,
As late thy brother boasted, she will calm
Her woes, and I shall clasp her aged knees
Again, in peace and liberty.——Alas!
He speaks not; all my fears are just.

ELIDURUS.

What fears?
The Queen GUIDERIA is not dead.

EVELINA.

Not dead!
But is she in that happy state of freedom,
Which we were taught to hope? Why sigh'st thou, Youth?
Thy years have yet been prosp'rous. Did thy father
E'er lose a kingdom? Did captivity
E'er seize thy shrieking mother? thou can'st go

To yonder cave, and find thy brother safe:
He is not lost, as mine is. Youth, thou sigh'st
Again; thou hast not sure such cause of sorrow
But if thou hast, give me thy griefs, I pray thee;
I have a heart can softly sympathize,
And sympathy is soothing.

ELIDURUS.

Oh gods! gods!
She tears my soul. What shall I say?

EVELINA.

Perchance,
For all in this bad world must have their woes,
Thou too hast thine; and may'st, like me, be wretched.
Haply amid the ruinous waste of war,
'Mid that wild havock, which those sons of blood
Bring on our groaning country, some chaste maid,
Whose tender soul was link'd by love to thine,
Might fall the trembling prey to Roman rage,
Ev'n at the golden hour, when holy rites
Had seal'd your virtuous vows. If it were so,
Indeed I pity her.

ELIDURUS.

Not that; not that.
Never 'till now did Beauty's matchless beam———
But I am dumb.

EVELINA.

Why that dejected eye?
And why this silence? that some weighty grief

O'erhangs thy soul, thy ev'ry look proclaims.
Why then refuse it words? The heart, that bleeds
From any stroke of fate or human wrongs,
Loves to disclose itself, that list'ning Pity
May drop a healing tear upon the wound.
'Tis only, when with inbred horror smote
At some base act, or done, or to be done,
That the recoiling soul, with conscious dread,
Shrinks back into itself. But thou, good Youth—

ELIDURUS.

Cease, royal maid! permit me to depart.

EVELINA.

Yet hear me, stranger! Truth and Secresy,
Though friends, are seldom necessary friends—

ELIDURUS.

I go to try my truth—

EVELINA.

Oh! go not hence
In wrath; think not, that I suspect thy virtue:
Yet ignorance may oft make virtue slide,
And if——

ELIDURUS.

In pity spare me.

EVELINA.

If thy brother——
Nay, start not, do not turn thine eye from mine;
Speak, I conjure thee, is his purpose honest?
I know the guilty price, that barbarous Rome

Sets on my father's head; and gold, vile gold,
Has now a charm for Britons: Brib'd by this,
Should he betray him—Yes, I see thou shudder'st
At the dire thought; yet not, as if 'twere strange;
But as our fears were mutual. Ah, young stranger;
That open face scarce needs a tongue to utter
What works within. Come then, ingenuous Prince,
And instant make discovery to the Druid,
While yet 'tis not too late.

ELIDURUS.

Ah! what discover?
Say, whom must I betray?

EVELINA.

Thy brother.

ELIDURUS.

Ha!

EVELINA.

Who is no brother, if his guilty soul
Teem with such perfidy. Oh all ye stars!
Can he be brother to a youth like thee,
Who would betray an old and honour'd king,
That king his countryman, and one whose prowess
Once guarded Britain 'gainst th' assailing world?
Can he be brother to a youth like thee,
Who from a young, defenceless, innocent maid,
Would take that king her father? Make her suffer
All that an orphan suffers? More perchance:
The ruffian foe.—Oh tears, ye choke my utterance!

Can he be brother to a youth like thee,
Who would defile his soul by such black deeds?
It cannot be——And yet, thou still art silent.
Turn, youth, and see me weep. Ah, see me kneel:
I am of royal blood, not wont to kneel:
Yet will I kneel to thee. Oh save my father!
Save a distressful maiden from the force
Of barbarous men! Be thou a brother to me,
For mine alas! Ah! [*Sees Arviragus entering.*

ARVIRAGUS, EVELINA, ELIDURUS, CHORUS.

ARVIRAGUS.

Evelina, rise!
Know, maid, I ne'er will tamely see thee kneel,
Ev'n at the foot of Cæsar.

EVELINA.

'Tis himself:
And he will prove my father's fears were false,
False, as his son is brave. Thou best of brothers,
Come to my arms. Where hast thou been, thou wand'rer?
How wer't thou sav'd? Indeed, Arviragus,
I never shed such tears, since thou wer't lost,
For these are tears of rapture.

ARVIRAGUS.

Evelina!
Fain would I greet thee, as a brother ought:
But wherefore didst thou kneel?

EVELINA.

Oh! ask not now.

ARVIRAGUS.

By heav'n I must, and he must answer me,
Whoe'er he be. What art thou, sullen stranger?

ELIDURUS.

A Briton.

ARVIRAGUS.

Brief and bold.

EVELINA.

Ah, spare the taunt:
He merits not thy wrath. Behold the Druids;
Lo, they advance: with holy reverence first
Thou must address their sanctity

ARVIRAGUS.

I will.
But see, proud boy, thou do'st not quit the grove,
'Till time allows us parley.

ELIDURUS.

Prince, I mean not.

ARVIRAGUS.

Sages, and sons of Heav'n! Illustrious Druids!
Abruptly I approach your sacred presence:
Yet such dire tidings———

CHORUS.

On thy peril, peace!
Thou stand'st accus'd, and by a father's voice,
Of crimes abhorr'd, of cowardice and flight;

And therefore may'st not in these sacred groves
Utter polluted accents. Quickly say,
Wherefore thou fled'st? For that base fact unclear'd
We hold no farther converse.

ARVIRAGUS.

Oh ye gods!
Am I the son of your CARACTACUS?
And could I fly?

CHORUS.

Waste not or time or words:
But tell us why thou fled'st?

ARVIRAGUS.

I fled not, Druid!
By the great gods I fled not! save to stop
Our dastard troops, that basely turn'd their backs.
I stopt, I rallied them, when lo! a shaft
Of random cast did level me with earth,
Where pale and senseless, as the slain around me,
I lay till midnight: Then, as from long trance
Awoke, I crawl'd upon my feeble limbs
To a lone cottage, where a pitying hind
Lodg'd me, and nourish'd me. My strength repair'd,
It boots not that I tell, what humble arts
Compell'd I us'd to screen me from the foe.
How now a peasant from a beggarly scrip
I sold cheap food to slaves, that nam'd the price,
Nor after gave it. Now a minstrel poor
With ill-tun'd harp, and uncouth descant shrill

I ply'd a thriftless trade, and by such shifts
Did win obscurity to shroud my name.
At length to other conquests in the north
Ostorius led his legions: Safer now,
Yet not secure, I to some valiant chiefs,
Whom war had spar'd, discover'd what I was;
And with them plann'd, how surest we might draw
Our scatter'd forces to some rocky fastness
In rough Caernarvon, there to breathe in freedom,
If not with brave incursion to oppress
The thinly-station'd foe. And soon our art
So well avail'd, that now at Snowdon's foot
Full twenty troops of hardy veterans wait
To call my sire their leader.

CHORUS.

Valiant Youth——

EVELINA.

He is——I said he was a valiant youth,
Nor has he sham'd his race.

CHORUS.

We do believe
Thy modest tale: And may the righteous gods
Thus ever shed upon thy noble breast
Discretion's cooling dew. When nurtur'd so,
Then, only then, doth valour bloom mature.

ARVIRAGUS.

Yet vain is valour, howsoe'er it bloom:
Druid, the gods frown on us. All my hopes

Are blasted; I shall ne'er rejoin my friends,
Ne'er bless them with my father. Holy men,
I have a tale to tell, will shake your souls.
Your Mona is invaded; Rome approaches,
Ev'n to these groves approaches.

SEMICHORUS.

Horror! Horror!

ARVIRAGUS.

Late as I landed on yon highest beach,
Where nodding from the rocks the poplars fling
Their scatter'd arms, and dash them in the wave,
There were their vessels moor'd, as if they sought
Concealment in the shade, and as I past
Up yon thick-planted ridge, I 'spy'd their helms
'Mid brakes and boughs trench'd in the heath below,
Where like a nest of night-worms did they glitter,
Sprinkling the plain with brightness. On I sped
With silent step, yet oft did pass so near,
'Twas next to prodigy I 'scap'd unseen.

CHORUS.

Their number, Prince?

ARVIRAGUS.

Few, if mine hasty eye
Did find, and count them all.

CHORUS.

Oh brethren, brethren,
Treason and sacrilege, worse foes than Rome,

Have led Rome hither. Instant seize that wretch,
And bring him to our presence.

CHORUS, ELIDURUS, ARVIRAGUS.

CHORUS.

Say, thou false one!
What doom befits the slave who sells his country?

ELIDURUS.

Death, sudden death!

CHORUS.

No, ling'ring peace-meal death;
And to such death thy brother and thyself
We now devote. Villain, thy deeds are known;
'Tis known, ye led the impious Romans hither
To slaughter us ev'n on our holy altars.

ELIDURUS.

That on my soul doth lie some secret grief
These looks perforce will tell: It is not fear,
Druids, it is not fear that shakes me thus;
The great gods know it is not: Ye can never:
For, what though wisdom lifts ye next those gods,
Ye cannot, like to them, unlock men's breasts,
And read their inmost thoughts. Ah! that ye could.

ARVIRAGUS.

What hast thou done?

ELIDURUS.

What, Prince, I will not tell.

CHORUS.

Wretch, there are means——

ELIDURUS.

I know, and terrible means;
And 'tis both fit, that you should try those means,
And I endure them: Yet I think my patience
Will for some space baffle your torturing fury.

CHORUS.

Be that best known, when our inflicted goads
Harrow thy flesh!

ARVIRAGUS.

Stranger, ere this is try'd
Confess the whole of thy black perfidy;
So black, that when I look upon thy youth,
Read thy mild eye, and mark thy modest brow,
I think indeed, thou durst not.

ELIDURUS.

Such a crime
Indeed I durst not; and would rather be
The very wretch thou seest. I'll speak no more.

CHORUS.

Brethren, 'tis so. The Virgin's thoughts were just:
This youth has been deceiv'd.

ELIDURUS.

Yes, one word more.
You say, the Romans have invaded Mona.
Give me a sword and twenty honest Britons,
And I will quell those Romans. Vain demand!

Alas! you cannot: ye are men of peace:
Religion's self forbids. Lead then to torture.

ARVIRAGUS.

Now on my soul this youth doth move me much.

CHORUS.

Think not religion and our holy office
Doth teach us tamely, like the bleating lamb,
To crouch before oppression, and with neck
Outstretch'd await the stroke. Mistaken boy!
Did not strict justice claim thee for her victim,
We might full safely send thee to these Romans,
Inviting their hot charge. Know, when I blow
That sacred trumpet bound with sable fillets
To yonder branching oak, the awful sound
Calls forth a thousand Britons train'd alike
In holy and in martial exercise,
Not by such mode and rule, as Romans use,
But of that fierce portentous horrible sort,
As shall appall ev'n Romans.

ELIDURUS.

Gracious gods!
Then there are hopes indeed. Oh call them instant,
This Prince will lead them on: I'll follow him,
Though in my chains, and some way dash them round
To harm the haughty foe.

ARVIRAGUS.

A thousand Britons,
And arm'd! Oh instant blow the sacred trump,
And let me head them. Yet methinks this youth——

CHORUS.

I know what thou wouldst say, might join thee, Prince.
True, were he free from crime, or had confest.

ELIDURUS.

Confest. Ah, think not, I will e'er——

ARVIRAGUS.

Reflect.

Either thyself or brother must have wrong'd us:
Then why conceal——

ELIDURUS.

Hast thou a brother? no!
Else hadst thou spar'd the word; and yet a sister
Lovely as thine might more than teach thee, Prince,
What 'tis to have a brother. Hear me, Druids,
Though I would prize an hour of freedom now
Before an age of any after date:
Though I would seize it as the gift of Heav'n,
And use it as Heav'n's gift: yet do not think,
I so will purchase it. Give it me freely,
I yet will spurn the boon, and hug my chains,
'Till you do swear by your own hoary heads,
My brother shall be safe.

CHORUS.

Excellent youth!
Thy words do speak thy soul, and such a soul,
As 'wakes our wonder. Thou art free; thy brother
Shall be thine honour's pledge! so will we use him,
As thou art false or true.

ELIDURUS.

I ask no other.

ARVIRAGUS.

Thus then, my fellow soldier, to thy clasp
I give the hand of friendship. Noble youth,
We'll speed, or die together.

CHORUS.

Hear us, Prince!
Mona permits not, that he fights her battles,
'Till duly purified: For though his soul
Took up unwittingly this deed of baseness,
Yet is lustration meet. Learn, that in vice
There is a noisome rankness unperceiv'd
By gross corporeal sense, which so offends
Heav'n's pure divinities, as us the stench
Of vapour wafted from sulphureous pool,
Or pois'nous weed obscene. Hence doth the man,
Who ev'n converses with a villain, need
As much purgation, as the pallid wretch
'Scap'd from the walls, where frowning Pestilence
Spreads wide her livid banners. For this cause,
Ye priests, conduct the youth to yonder grove,
And do the needful rites. Mean while ourself
Will lead thee, Prince, unto thy father's presence.——
But hold, the King comes forth.

[*Exeunt Priests with Elidurus.*

CARACTACUS, ARVIRAGUS, CHORUS, EVELINA.

CARACTACUS.

My son, my son!
What joy, what transport, doth thine aged sire
Feel in these filial foldings! Speak not, boy,
Nor interrupt that heart-felt ecstacy
Should strike us mute. I know what thou wouldst say,
Yet prithee, peace. Thy sister's voice hath clear'd thee,
And could excuse find words at this blest moment,
Trust me, I'd give it vent. But 'tis enough,
Thy father welcomes thee to him and honour:
Honour, that now with rapt'rous certainty
Calls thee his own true offspring. Dost thou weep?
Ah, if thy tears swell not from joy's free spring,
I beg thee spare them; I have done thee wrong,
Can make thee no atonement: None, alas!
Thy father scarce can bless thee, as he ought;
Unblest himself, beset with foes around,
Bereft of queen, of kingdom, and of soldiers,
He can but give thee portion of his dangers,
Perchance and of his chains: Yet droop not, boy,
Virtue is still thine own.

ARVIRAGUS.

It is, my father;
Pure as from thine illustrious fount it came:
And that unsullied, let the world oppress us;
Let Fraud and Falsehood rivet fetters on us;

Still shall our souls be free: Yet hope is ours,
As well as virtue.

CARACTACUS.

Spoken like a Briton.
True, hope is ours, and therefore let's prepare:
The moments now are precious. Tell us, Druid,
Is it not meet, we see the bands drawn out,
And mark their due array?

CHORUS.

Monarch, ev'n now
They skirt the grove.

CARACTACUS.

Then let us to their front——

CHORUS.

But is the traitor youth in safety lodg'd?

CARACTACUS.

Druid, he fled——

CHORUS.

Oh fatal flight to Mona!

CARACTACUS.

But what of that? ARVIRAGUS is here,
My son is here, let then the traitor go,
By this he has join'd the Romans: Let him join them;
A single arm, and that a villain's arm,
Can lend but little aid to any powers
Oppos'd to truth and virtue. Come, my son,
Let's to the troops, and marshal them with speed.
That done, we from these venerable men

Will claim their ready blessing: Then to battle;
And the swift sun ev'n at his purple dawn
Shall spy us crown'd with conquest, or with death.

[*Exeunt Caractacus and Arviragus.*

CHORUS, EVELINA.

CHORUS.

What may his flight portend! Say, EVELINA,
How came this youth to 'scape?

EVELINA.

And that to tell
Will fix much blame on my impatient folly:
For, ere your hallow'd lips had given permission,
I flew with eager haste to bear my father
News of his son's return. Inflam'd with that,
Think, how a sister's zealous breast must glow?
Your looks give mild assent. I glow'd indeed
With the dear tale, and sped me in his ear
To pour the precious tidings: But my tongue
Scarce nam'd ARVIRAGUS, ere the false stranger
(As I bethink me since) with stealthy pace
Fled to the cavern's mouth.

CHORUS.

The king pursu'd?

EVELINA.

Alas! he mark'd him not, for 'twas the moment,
When he had all to ask and all to fear,
Touching my brother's valour. Hitherto

His safety only, which but little mov'd him,
Had reach'd his ears: But when my tongue unfolded
The story of his bravery and his peril,
Oh how the tears cours'd plenteous down his cheeks!
How did he lift unto the heav'ns his hands
In speechless transport! Yet he soon bethought him
Of Rome's invasion, and with fiery glance
Survey'd the cavern round; then snatch'd his spear,
And menac'd to pursue the flying traitor:
But I with prayers (Oh pardon, if they err'd)
Withheld his step, for to the left the youth
Had wing'd his way, where the thick underwood
Afforded sure retreat. Besides, if found,
Was age a match for youth?

CHORUS.

Maiden, enough;
Better perchance for us, if he were captive:
But in the justice of their cause, and Heav'n,
Do Mona's sons confide.

BARD, CHORUS, ELIDURUS, EVELINA.

BARD.

Druid, the rites
Are finish'd, all save that which crowns the rest,
And which pertains to thy blest hand alone;
For that he kneels before thee.

CHORUS.

Take him hence,
We may not trust him forth to fight our cause.

ELIDURUS.

Now by ANDRASTE's throne ——

CHORUS.

Nay, swear not, Youth,
The tie is broke, that held thy fealty:
Thy brother's fled.

ELIDURUS.

Fled!

CHORUS.

To the Romans fled;
Yes, thou hast cause to tremble.

ELIDURUS.

Ah, VELLINUS!
Does thus our love, does thus our friendship end!
Was I thy brother, Youth, and hast thou left me!
Yes; and how left me, cruel as thou art,
The victim of thy crimes!

CHORUS.

True, thou must die.

ELIDURUS.

I pray ye then on your best mercy, Fathers,
It may be speedy. I would fain be dead,
If this be life. Yet I must doubt ev'n that
For falsehood of this strange stupendous sort
Sets firm-ey'd Reason on a gaze, mistrusting,
That what she sees in palpable plain form,
The stars in yon blue arch, these woods, these caverns,
Are all mere tricks of cozenage, nothing real,

The vision of a vision. If he's fled,
I ought to hate this brother.

CHORUS.

Yet thou dost not.

ELIDURUS.

But when astonishment will give me leave,
Perchance I shall.—And yet he is my brother,
And he was virtuous once. Yes, ye vile Romans,
Yes, I must die, before my thirsty sword
Drinks one rich drop of vengeance. Yet, ye robbers,
Yet will I curse you with my dying lips:
'Twas you, that stole away my brother's virtue.

CHORUS.

Now then prepare to die.

ELIDURUS.

I am prepar'd.
Yet, since I cannot now (what most I wish'd)
By manly prowess guard this lovely maid:
Permit that on your holiest earth I kneel,
And pour one fervent prayer for her protection.
Allow me this, for though you think me false,
The gods will hear me.

EVELINA.

I can hold no longer!
Oh Druid, Druid, at thy feet I fall:
Yes, I must plead, (away with virgin-blushes)
For such a youth must plead. I'll die to save him,
Oh take my life, and let him fight for Mona.

CHORUS.

Virgin, arise. His virtue hath redeem'd him,
And he shall fight for thee and for his country.
Youth, thank us with thy deeds. The time is short,
And now with reverence take our high lustration:
Thrice do we sprinkle thee with day-break dew
Shook from the May-thorn blossom; twice and thrice
Touch we thy forehead with our holy wand:
Now thou art fully purg'd. Now rise restor'd
To virtue and to us. Hence then, my son,
Hie thee to yonder altar, where our Bards
Shall arm thee duly both with helm and sword
For warlike enterprise. [*Exit Elidurus.*

CARACTACUS, CHORUS, ARVIRAGUS, EVELINA.

CARACTACUS.

'Tis true, my Son,
Bold are their bearings, and I fear me not
But they have hearts will not belie their looks.
I like them well. Yet would to righteous Heav'n
Those valiant veterans, that on Snowdon guard
Their scanty pittance of bleak liberty,
Were here to join them; we would teach these wolves,
Though we permit their rage to prowl our coasts,
That vengeance 'waits them ere they rob our altars.
Hail, Druid, hail! we find thy valiant guards
Accoutred so, as well bespeaks the wisdom

That fram'd their phalanx. We but wait thy blessing
To lead them 'gainst the foe.

CHORUS.

CARACTACUS!

Behold this sword: The sword of old BELINUS,
Stain'd with the blood of giants, and its name
TRIFINGUS. Many an age its charmed blade
Has slept within yon consecrated trunk.
Lo, I unsheath it, King; I wave it o'er thee;
Mark, what portentous streams of scarlet light
Flow from the brandish'd falchion. On thy knee
Receive the sacred pledge.—And mark our words,
By the bright circle of the golden sun,
By the brief courses of the errant moon,
By the dread potency of every star
That studs the mystic zodiac's burning girth,
By each, and all of these supernal signs,
We do adjure thee, with this trusty blade,
To guard yon central oak, whose holiest stem
Involves the spirit of high TARANIS:
This be thy charge; to which in aid we join
Ourselves, and our sage brethren. With our vassals
Thy son and the Brigantian prince shall make
Incursion on the foe.

CARACTACUS.

In this, and all,
Be ours observance meet. Yet surely, Druid,
The fresh and active vigour of these youths

Might better suit with this important charge.
Not that my heart shrinks at the glorious task,
But will with ready zeal pour forth its blood
Upon the sacred roots, my firmest courage
Might fail to save. Yet, Fathers, I am old;
And if I fell the foremost in the onset,
Should leave a son behind, might still defend you.

CHORUS.

The sacred adjuration we have utter'd
May never be recall'd,

CARACTACUS.

Then be it so.
But do not think, I counsel this through fear:
Old as I am, I trust with half our powers
I could drive back these Romans to their ships;
Dastards, that come as doth the cow'ring fowler
To tangle me with snares, and take me tamely:
Slaves, they shall find, that ere they gain their prey,
They have to hunt it boldly with barb'd spears,
And meet such conflict, as the chafed boar
Gives to his stout assailants. Oh ye gods!
That I might instant face them.

CHORUS.

Be thy son's
The onset.

ARVIRAGUS.

From his soul that son doth thank ye,
Blessing the wisdom, that preserves his father

Thus to the last. Oh if the fav'ring gods
Direct this arm, if their high will permit
I pour a prosperous vengeance on the foe,
I ask for life no longer, than to crown
The valiant task. Steel then, ye Powers of heav'n,
Steel my firm soul with your own fortitude,
Free from alloy of passion. Give me courage,
That knows not rage; revenge, that knows not malice;
Let me not thirst for carnage, but for conquest:
And conquest gain'd, sleep vengeance in my breast,
Ere in its sheath my sword.

CARACTACUS.

Oh hear his father!
If ever rashness spurr'd me on, great gods,
To acts of danger thirsting for renown;
If e'er my eager soul pursu'd its course
Beyond just reason's limit, visit not
My faults on him. I am the thing you made me;
Vindictive, bold, precipitate, and fierce:
But as you gave to him a milder mind,
Oh bless him, bless him with a milder fate!

EVELINA.

Nor yet unheard let Evelina pour
Her pray'rs and tears. Oh hear a hapless maid,
That ev'n through half the years her life has number'd,
Ev'n nine long years has dragg'd a trembling being,
Beset with pains and perils. Give her peace;
And, to endear it more, be that blest peace

Won by her brother's sword. Oh bless his arm,
And bless his valiant followers, one, and all.

ELIDURUS *entering armed.*

Hear, Heav'n! and let this pure and virgin pray'r
Plead ev'n for ELIDURUS, whose sad soul
Cannot look up to your immortal thrones,
And urge his own request: Else would he ask,
That all the dangers of th' approaching fight
Might fall on him alone: That every spear
The Romans wield might at his breast be aim'd;
Each arrow darted on his rattling helm;
That so the brother of this beauteous maid,
Returning safe with victory and peace,
Might bear them to her bosom.

CHORUS.

Now rise all;
And Heav'n, that knows what most ye ought to ask,
Grant all ye ought to have. Behold, the stars
Are faded; universal darkness reigns.
Now is the dreadful hour, now will our torches
Glare with more livid horror, now our shrieks
And clanking arms will more appal the foe.
But heed, ye Bards, that for the sign of onset
Ye sound the ancientest of all your rhymes,
Whose birth tradition notes not, nor who fram'd
Its lofty strains: The force of that high air
Did JULIUS feel, when, fir'd by it, our fathers
First drove him recreant to his ships; and ill

Had far'd his second landing, but that fate
Silenc'd the master Bard, who led the song.
Now forth, brave pair! Go, with our blessing go;
Mute be the march, as ye ascend the hill:
Then, when ye hear the sound of our shrill trumpet,
Fall on the foe.

CARACTACUS.

Now glory be thy guide;
Pride of my soul, go forth and conquer.

EVELINA.

Brother,
Yet one embrace. Oh thou much-honour'd stranger,
I charge thee fight by my dear brother's side,
And shield him from the foe; for he is brave,
And will with bold and well-directed arm
Return thy succour.

[*Exeunt Arviragus and Elidurus.*

CHORUS.

Now, ye priests, with speed
Strew on the altar's height your sacred leaves,
And light the morning flame. But why is this?
Why doth our brother MADOR snatch his harp
From yonder bough? Why this way bend his step?

CARACTACUS.

He is entranc'd. The fillet bursts, that bound
His liberal locks; his snowy vestments fall
In ampler folds; and all his floating form
Doth seem to glisten with divinity!

Yet is he speechless. Say, thou chief of Bards,
What is there in this airy vacancy,
That thou with fiery and irregular glance
Should'st scan thus wildly? wherefore heaves thy breast?
Why starts——

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. 1.

Hark! heard ye not yon footstep dread,
That shook the earth with thund'ring tread?
'Twas DEATH.—In haste
The warrior past;
High tower'd his helmed head:
I mark'd his mail, I mark'd his shield,
I 'spy'd the sparkling of his spear,
I saw his giant arm the falchion wield;
Wide wav'd the bick'ring blade, and fir'd the angry air.

I. 2.

On me (he cry'd) my Britons, wait,
To lead you to the field of fate
I come: Yon car,
That cleaves the air,
Descends to throne my state:
I mount, your champion and your god.
My proud steeds neigh beneath the thong:
Hark! to my wheels of brass, that rattle loud!
Hark! to my clarion* shrill, that brays the woods among!

* Here one of the Druids blows the sacred trumpet.

I. 3.

Fear not now the fever's fire,
Fear not now the death-bed groan,
Pangs that torture, pains that tire,
Bed-rid age with feeble moan:
These domestic terrors wait
Hourly at my palace gate;
And when o'er slothful realms my rod I wave,
These on the tyrant king and coward slave
Rush with vindictive rage, and drag them to their grave.

II. 1.

But ye, my sons, at this high hour
Shall share the fulness of my power:
From all your bows,
In levell'd rows,
My own dread shafts shall shower.
Go then to conquest, gladly go,
Deal forth my dole of destiny,
With all my fury dash the trembling foe
Down to those darksome dens, where Rome's pale spectres lie.

II. 2.

Where creeps the ninefold stream profound
Her black inexorable round,
And on the bank,
To willows dank,
The shiv'ring ghosts are bound.

Twelve thousand crescents all shall swell
To full-orb'd pride, and fading die,
Ere they again in life's gay mansions dwell:
Not such the meed that crowns the sons of liberty.

II. 3.

No, my Britons! battle-slain,
Rapture gilds your parting hour:
I, that all despotic reign,
Claim but there a moment's power.
Swiftly the soul of British flame
Animates some kindred frame,
Swiftly to life and light triumphant flies,
Exults again in martial ecstasies,
Again for freedom fights, again for freedom dies.

CARACTACUS.

It does, it does! unconquer'd, undismay'd,
The British soul revives—Champion, lead on,
I follow—give me way. Some blessed shaft
Will rid me of this clog of cumb'rous age;
And I again shall in some happier mould
Rise to redeem my country.

CHORUS.

Stay thee, Prince,
And mark what clear and amber-skirted clouds
Rise from the altar's verge, and cleave the skies:
Oh 'tis a prosperous omen! Soon expect
To hear glad tidings.

CARACTACUS.

I will send them to thee.

CHORUS.

But see, a Bard approaches, and he bears them:
Else is his eye no herald to his heart.

BARD, CHORUS, CARACTACUS.

CARACTACUS.

Speedily tell thy tale.

BARD.

A tale like mine,
I trust your ears will willingly pursue
Through each glad circumstance. First, Monarch, learn,
The Roman troop is fled.

CHORUS.

Great gods, we thank ye!

CARACTACUS.

Fought they not ere they fled? Oh tell me all.

BARD.

Silent, as night, that wrapt us in her veil,
We pac'd up yonder hill, whose woody ridge
O'erhung the ambush'd foe. No sound was heard,
Step felt, or sight descry'd: for safely hid,
Beneath the purple pall of sacrifice
Did sleep our holy fire, nor saw the air,
Till to that pass we came, where whilom BRUTE
Planted his five hoar altars. To our rites
Then swift we hasted, and in one short moment

The rocky piles were cloth'd with livid flame.
Near each a white-rob'd Druid, whose stern voice
Thunder'd deep execrations on the foe.
Now wak'd our horrid symphony, now all
Our harps terrific rang: Meanwhile the grove
Trembled, the altars shook, and through our ranks
Our sacred sisters rush'd in sable robes,
With hair dishevell'd, and funereal brands
Hurl'd round with menacing fury. On they rush'd
In fierce and frantic mood, as is their wont
Amid the magic rites, they do to Night
In their deep dens below. Motions like these
Were never dar'd before in open air!

CHORUS.

Did I not say, we had a pow'r within us.
That might appall ev'n Romans?

BARD.

And it did.
They stood aghast, and to our vollied darts,
That thick as hail fell on their helms and corslets,
Scarce rais'd a warding shield. The sacred trumpet
Then rent the air, and instant at the signal
Rush'd down ARVIRAGUS with all our vassals;
A hot, but short-liv'd, conflict then ensu'd:
For soon they fled. I saw the Romans fly,
Before I left the field.

CARACTACUS.

My son pursu'd?

BARD.

The prince and ELIDURUS, like twin lions,
Did side by side engage. Death seem'd to guide
Their swords, no stroke fell fruitless, every wound
Gave him a victim.

CARACTACUS.

Thus my friend EBRANCUS!
Ill-fated Prince! didst thou and I in youth
Unite our valours. In his prime he fell,
On Conway's banks I saw him fall, and slew
His murderer.—But how far did they pursue?

BARD.

Ev'n to the ships: For I descry'd the rout,
Far as the twilight gleam would aid my sight.

CARACTACUS.

Now, thanks to the bright star that rul'd his birth;
Yes, he will soon return to claim my blessing,
And he shall have it pour'd in tears of joy
On his bold breast! methought I heard a step:
Is it not his?

BARD.

'Tis some of our own train,
And as I think, they lead six Romans captive.

CHORUS, CARACTACUS, CAPTIVES.

CHORUS.

My brethren, bear the prisoners to the cavern,
'Till we demand them.

CARACTACUS.

Pause ye yet awhile.
They seem of bold demeanour, and have helms,
That speak them leaders. Hear me, Romans, hear.
That you are captives, is the chance of war:
Yet captives as ye are, in Britain's eye
Ye are not slaves. Barbarians though ye call us,
We know the native rights man claims from man,
And therefore never shall we gall your necks
With chains, or drag you at our scythed cars
In arrogance of triumph. Nor 'till taught
By Rome (what Britain sure should scorn to learn)
Her avarice, will we barter you for gold.
True, ye are captives, and our country's safety
Forbids we give you back to liberty:
We give you therefore to the immortal gods,
To them we lift you in the radiant cloud
Of sacrifice. They may in limbs of freedom
Replace your free-born souls, and their high mercy
Haply shall to some better world advance you;
Or else in this restore that golden gift,
Which lost, leaves life a burden. Does there breathe
A wretch so pall'd with the vain fear of death
Can call this cruelty? 'tis love, 'tis mercy;
And grant, ye gods, if e'er I'm made a captive,
I meet the like fair treatment from the foe,
Whose stronger star quells mine. Now lead them on,
And, while they live, treat them, as men should men,

And not as Rome treats Britain. [*Exeunt Captives.*

Druid, these,
Ev'n should their chief escape, may to the gods
Be given in sacrifice.

CHORUS.

O think not, King,
That Mona shall be curst by these dire rites.
Ev'n from the youth of Time yon holy altar
Has held the place thou seest; ages on ages
Have there done sacrifice: but never yet
Stream'd it with human gore, nor ever shall
While we hold office here. 'Tis true, that Gaul,
True too that Briton, by the Gauls mistaught,
Have done such deeds of horror; deeds, that shock'd
Humanity, and call'd from angry Heav'n
These curses on our country.

CARACTACUS.

Can the gods
Behold a sight more grateful, than the flame,
That blasts impiety?

CHORUS.

Admit they cannot:
Need they the hand of man to light that flame?
Have not those gods their lightning? TARANIS
Doth he not wield the thunder?

CARACTACUS.

Holy Druid,
I stand rebuk'd: Will ye then pardon them?

CHORUS.

We say not that. Vengeance shall have her course,
But Vengeance in her own peculiar garb,
Not in the borrow'd weeds of sage Religion:
They suit not her.—Whence was that shriek?

EVELINA, CARACTACUS, CHORUS.

EVELINA.

My Father,
Support me, take me trembling to your arms;
All is not well. Ah me, my fears o'ercome me!

CARACTACUS.

What means my child?

EVELINA.

Alas! we are betray'd.
Ev'n now as wand'ring in yon eastern grove
I call'd the gods to aid us, the dread sound
Of many hasty steps did meet mine ear:
This way they prest.

CARACTACUS.

Daughter, thy fears are vain.

EVELINA.

Methought I saw the flame of lighted brands,
And what did glitter to my dazzled sight
Like swords and helms.

CARACTACUS.

All, all the feeble coinage
Of maiden fear.

EVELINA.

Nay, if mine ear mistook not,
I heard the traitor's voice, who that way 'scap'd,
Calling to arms.

CARACTACUS.

Away with idle terrors!
Know, thy brave brother's helm is crown'd with conquest,
Our foes are fled, their leaders are our captives.
Smile, my lov'd child, and imitate the sun,
That rises ruddy from behind yon oaks,
To hail him victor.

CHORUS.

That the rising sun!
Oh horror! horror! sacrilegious fires
Devour our groves: they blaze, they blaze! Oh sound
The trump again; recall the Prince, or all
Is lost.

CARACTACUS.

Druid, where is thy fortitude?
Do not I live? Is not this holy sword
Firm in my grasp? I will preserve your groves.
Britons, I go: Let those that dare die nobly,
Follow my step. [*Exit Caractacus.*

EVELINA.

Oh whither does he go?
Return, return: Ye holy men, recall him.
What is his arm against a host of Romans?
Oh I have lost a father!

CHORUS.

Ruthless gods!
Ye take away our souls: A general panic
Reigns thro' the grove. Oh fly, my brethren, fly
To aid the king, fly to preserve your altars!
Alas! 'tis all in vain; our fate is fixt.
Look there, look there, thou miserable Maid!
Behold thy bleeding brother.

ARVIRAGUS, ELIDURUS, EVELINA, CHORUS.

ARVIRAGUS.

Thanks, good Youth!
Safe hast thou brought me to that holy spot,
Where I did wish to die. Support me still.
Oh, I am sick to death. Yet one step more:
Now lay me gently down. I would drag out
This life, though at some cost of throbs and pangs,
Just long enough to claim my father's blessing,
And sigh my last breath in my sister's arms.—
And here she kneels, poor maid! all dumb with grief.
Restrain thy sorrow, gentlest Evelina.
True, thou dost see me bleed: I bleed to death.

EVELINA.

Say'st thou to death? Oh gods! the barbed shaft
Is buried in his breast. Yes, he must die;
And I, alas! am doom'd to see him die.
Where are your healing arts, medicinal herbs,
Ye holy men, your wonder-working spells?

Pluck me but out this shaft, stanch but this blood,
And I will call down blessings on your heads
With such a fervency—And can ye not!
Then let me beg you on my bended knee,
Give to my misery some opiate drug,
May shut up all my senses.—Yes, good Fathers,
Mingle the potion so, that it may kill me
Just at the instant, this poor languisher
Heaves his last sigh.

ARVIRAGUS.

Talk not thus wildly, Sister,
Think on our father's age——

EVELINA.

Alas! my Brother!
We have no father now; or if we have,
He is a captive.

ARVIRAGUS.

Captive! Oh my wound!
It stings me now—But is it so! [*Turning to the Chorus.*

CHORUS.

Alas!
We know no more, save that he sallied single
To meet the foe, whose unexpected host
Round by the east had wound their fraudful march,
And fir'd our groves.

ELIDURUS.

Oh fatal, fatal valour!
Then is he seiz'd, or slain.

ARVIRAGUS.

Too sure he is!

Druid, not half the Romans met our swords;
We found the fraud too late: the rest are yonder.

CHORUS.

How could they gain the pass?

ARVIRAGUS.

The wretch, that fled
That way, return'd, conducting half their powers;
And—But thy pardon, Youth, I will not wound thee,
He is thy brother.

ELIDURUS.

Thus my honest sword
Shall force the blood from the detested heart,
That holds alliance with him.

ARVIRAGUS.

Elidurus,
Hold, on our friendship, hold. Thou noble Youth,
Look on this innocent maid. She must to Rome,
Captive to Rome. Thou see'st warm life flow from me,
Ere long she'll have no brother. Heav'n's my witness,
I do not wish, that thou shouldst live the slave
Of Rome: But yet she is my sister.

ELIDURUS.

Prince!
Thou urgest that, might make me drag an age
In fetters worse than Roman. I will live,
And while I live———

Enter BARD.

Fly to your caverns, Druids,
The grove's beset around. The chief approaches.

CHORUS.

Let him approach, we will confront his pride;
The Seer that rules amid the groves of Mona
Has not to fear his fury. What tho' age
Slacken our sinews; what tho' shield and sword
Give not their iron aid to guard our body;
Yet virtue arms our soul, and 'gainst that panoply
What 'vails the rage of robbers? Let him come.

ARVIRAGUS.

I faint apace.—Ye venerable men,
If ye can save this body from pollution,
If ye can tomb me in this sacred place,
I trust ye will. I fought to save these groves,
And, fruitless tho' I fought, some grateful oak,
I trust, will spread its reverential gloom
O'er my pale ashes—Ah! that pang was death!
My sister, Oh!——— [*Dies.*

ELIDURUS.

She faints! Ah raise her!———

EVELINA.

Yes,
Now he is dead. I felt his spirit go
In a cold sigh, and as it past, methought
It paus'd awhile, and trembled on my lips!
Take me not from him: Breathless as he is,

He is my brother still, and if the gods
Do please to grace him with some happier being,
They ne'er can give to him a fonder sister.

CHORUS.

Brethren, surround the corse, and, ere the foe
Approaches, chant with meet solemnity
That grateful dirge your dying champion claims.

SEMICHORUS.

Lo, where incumbent o'er the shade
Rome's rav'ning eagle bows her beaked head!
Yet while a moment fate affords,
While yet a moment freedom stays,
That moment, which outweighs
Eternity's unmeasur'd hoards,
Shall Mona's grateful Bards employ
To hymn their godlike hero to the sky.

SEMICHORUS.

Ring out, ye mortal strings;
Answer, thou heav'nly harp, instinct with spirit all,
That o'er the jasper arch self-warbling swings
Of blest ANDRASTE's throne:
Thy sacred sounds alone
Can celebrate the fall
Of bold ARVIRAGUS—

[*Enter Aulus Didius and Romans.*

AULUS DIDIUS, CHORUS, EVELINA, ELIDURUS.

AULUS DIDIUS.

Ye bloody Priests,
Behold we burst on your infernal rites,
And bid you pause. Instant restore our soldiers,
Nor hope that Superstition's ruthless step
Shall wade in Roman gore. Ye savage men,
Did not our laws give license to all faiths,
We would o'erturn your altars, headlong heave
These shapeless symbols of your barbarous gods,
And let the golden sun into your caves.

CHORUS.

Servant of CÆSAR, has thine impious tongue
Spent the black venom of its blasphemy?
It has. Then take our curses on thine head,
Ev'n his fell curses, who doth reign in Mona,
Vicegerent of those gods thy pride insults.

AULUS DIDIUS.

Bold Priest, I scorn thy curses, and thyself.
Soldiers, go search the caves, and free the prisoners.
Take heed, ye seize CARACTACUS alive.
Arrest yon youth; load him with heaviest irons,
He shall to CÆSAR answer for his crime.

ELIDURUS.

I stand prepar'd to triumph in my crime.

AULUS DIDIUS.

'Tis well, proud Boy—Look to the beauteous maid,

[*To the Soldiers.*

That tranc'd in grief, bends o'er yon bleeding corse,
Respect her sorrows.

EVELINA.

Hence, ye barbarous men,
Ye shall not take him welt'ring thus in blood,
To show at Rome what British virtue was.
Avaunt! The breathless body that ye touch
Was once ARVIRAGUS!

AULUS DIDIUS.

Fear us not, Princess,
We reverence the dead.

CHORUS.

Would too to Heav'n,
Ye reverenc'd the gods but ev'n enough
Not to debase with slavery's cruel chain,
What they created free.

AULUS DIDIUS.

The Romans fight
Not to enslave, but humanize the world.

CHORUS.

Go to, we will not parley with thee, Roman:
Instant pronounce our doom.

AULUS DIDIUS.

Hear it, and thank us.
This once our clemency shall spare your groves,
If at our call ye yield the British King:
Yet learn, when next ye aid the foes of CÆSAR,
That each old oak, whose solemn gloom ye boast,
Shall bow beneath our axes.

CHORUS.

Be they blasted,
Whene'er their shade forgets to shelter virtue.

Enter BARD.

Mourn, Mona, mourn. CARACTACUS is captive!
And dost thou smile, false Roman? Do not think
He fell an easy prey. Know, ere he yielded,
Thy bravest veterans bled. He too, thy spy,
The base Brigantian Prince, hath seal'd his fraud
With death. Bursting thro' armed ranks, that hemm'd
The caitiff round, the brave CARACTACUS
Seiz'd his false throat; and as he gave him death,
Indignant thunder'd, 'Thus is my last stroke
'The stroke of justice.' Numbers then opprest him:
I saw the slave, that cowardly behind
Pinion'd his arms; I saw the sacred sword
Writh'd from his grasp: I saw, what now ye see,
Inglorious sight! those barbarous bonds upon him.

CARACTACUS, AULUS DIDIUS, CHORUS, &c.

CARACTACUS.

Romans, methinks the malice of your tyrant
Might furnish heavier chains. Old as I am,
And wither'd as you see these war-worn limbs,
Trust me, they shall support the weightiest load
Injustice dares impose.——
Proud-crested soldier! [*To Didius.*
Who seem'st the master-mover in this business,
Say, dost thou read less terror on my brow,

Than when thou met'st me in the fields of war
Heading my nations? No, my free-born soul
Has scorn still left to sparkle through these eyes,
And frown defiance on thee.—— Is it thus!

[*Seeing his Son's body.*

Then I'm indeed a captive. Mighty gods!
My soul, my soul submits: Patient it bears
The pond'rous load of grief ye heap upon it.
Yes, it will grovel in this shatter'd breast,
And be the sad tame thing it ought to be,
Coopt in a servile body.

AULUS DIDIUS.

Droop not, King.
When CLAUDIUS, the great master of the world,
Shall hear the noble story of thy valour,
His pity———

CARACTACUS.

Can a Roman pity, Soldier?
And if he can, gods! must a Briton bear it?
ARVIRAGUS, my bold, my breathless boy,
Thou hast escap'd such pity; thou art free.
Here in high Mona shall thy noble limbs
Rest in a noble grave; posterity
Shall to thy tomb with annual reverence bring
Sepulchral stones, and pile them to the clouds:
Whilst mine———

AULUS DIDIUS.

The morn doth hasten our departure.

Prepare thee, King, to go: A fav'ring gale
Now swells our sails.

CARACTACUS.

Inhuman that thou art!
Dost thou deny a moment for a father
To shed a few warm tears o'er his dead son?
I tell thee, Chief, this act might claim a life,
To do it duly; even a longer life,
Than sorrow ever suffer'd. Cruel man!
And thou deny'st me moments. Be it so.
I know you Romans weep not for your children;
Ye triumph o'er your tears, and think it valour:
I triumph in my tears. Yes, best-lov'd Boy,
Yes, I can weep, can fall upon thy corse,
And I can tear my hairs, these few gray hairs,
The only honours war and age hath left me.
Ah, Son! thou might'st have rul'd o'er many nations,
As did thy royal ancestry: But I,
Rash that I was, ne'er knew the golden curb
Discretion hangs on brav'ry: Else perchance
These men, that fasten fetters on thy father,
Had sued to him for peace, and claim'd his friendship.

AULUS DIDIUS.

But thou wast still implacable to Rome,
And scorn'd her friendship.

CARACTACUS *starting up from the Body.*

Soldier, I had arms,
Had neighing steeds to whirl my iron cars,

Had wealth, dominion. Dost thou wonder, Roman,
I fought to save them? What, if CÆSAR aims,
To lord it universal o'er the world,
Shall the world tamely crouch at CÆSAR's footstool?

AULUS DIDIUS.

Read in thy fate our answer. Yet if sooner
Thy pride had yielded——

CARACTACUS.

Thank thy gods, I did not.
Had it been so, the glory of thy master,
Like my misfortunes, had been short and trivial,
Oblivion's ready prey: Now after struggling
Nine years, and that right bravely 'gainst a tyrant,
I am his slave, to treat as seems him good;
If cruelly, 'twill be an easy task
To bow a wretch, alas! how bow'd already!
Down to the dust: If well, his clemency,
When trick'd and varnish'd by your glossing penmen,
Will shine in honour's annals, and adorn
Himself; it boots not me. Look there, look there,
The slave that shot that dart, kill'd ev'ry hope
Of lost CARACTACUS! Arise, my daughter.
Alas! poor Prince; art thou too in vile fetters?

[*To Elidurus.*

Come hither, youth: Be thou to me a son,
To her a brother. Thus with trembling arms
I lead you forth; Children, we go to Rome.
Weep'st thou, my Girl? I prithee hoard thy tears

For the sad meeting of thy captive mother:
For we have much to tell her, much to say
Of these good men, who nurtur'd us in Mona;
Much of the fraud and malice, that pursu'd us;
Much of her son, who pour'd his precious blood
To save his sire and sister: Think'st thou, Maid,
Her gentleness can hear the tale and live?
And yet she must. Oh gods, I grow a talker!
Grief and old age are ever full of words:
But I'll be mute. Adieu! ye holy men;
Yet one look more—Now lead us hence for ever.

LETTERS.

LETTER I.

I WAS aware, when I sent you my Poem,* that it would be liable to the very objections you make to it. Yet perhaps they will be obviated to your satisfaction, when I have laid before you (as indeed I ought to have done at first) the original idea which led me to chuse such a subject, and to execute it in so peculiar a manner.

Had I intended to give an exact copy of the antient drama, your objections to the present Poem would be unanswerable. But my design was much less confined, I meant only to pursue the antient method, so far as it is probable a Greek poet, were he alive, would now do, in order to adapt himself to the genius of our times, and the character of our Tragedy. According to this notion, every thing was to be allowed to the present taste, which nature and Aristotle could possibly dispense with; and nothing of intrigue or refinement was to be admitted, at which antient judgment could reasonably take offence.

NOTE.

* ELFRIDA, to which these Letters were prefixt in the former Editions of that Poem.

Good sense, as well as antiquity, prescribed an adherence to the three great Unities; these therefore were strictly observed. But on the other hand, to follow the modern masters in those respects wherein they had not so faultily deviated from their predecessors, a story was chosen, in which the tender rather than the noble passions were predominant, and in which even love had the principal share. Characters too were drawn as nearly approaching to private ones, as tragic dignity would permit; and affections raised rather from the impulse of common humanity, than the distresses of royalty and the fate of kingdoms. Besides this, for the sake of natural embellishment, and to reconcile mere modern readers to that simplicity of fable, in which I thought it necessary to copy the antients, I contrived to lay the scene in an old romantic forest. For, by this means, I was enabled to enliven the Poem by various touches of pastoral description; not affectedly brought in from the store-house of a picturesque imagination, but necessarily resulting from the scenery of the place itself; a beauty so extremely striking in the Comus of Milton, and the As you like it of Shakespear; and of which the Greek Muse (though fond of rural imagery) has afforded few examples, besides that admirable one in the Philoctetes of Sophocles.

By this idea I could wish you to regulate your criticism. I need not, I think, observe to you that these deviations from the practice of the antients may be reasonably

defended. For we were long since agreed, that where love does not degenerate into episodical gallantry, but makes the foundation of the distress, it is, from the universality of its influence, a passion very proper for Tragedy. And I have seen you too much moved at the representation of some of our best Tragedies of private story, to believe you will condemn me for making the other deviation.

LETTER II.

I am glad you approve the method I have taken of softening the rigour of the old drama. If I have, indeed, softened it sufficiently for the modern taste, without parting with any of the essentials of the Greek method, I have obtained my purpose: which was to obviate some of the popular objections made to the antient form of Tragedy. For the current opinion, you know, is, that by the strict adherence to the Unities, it restrains the genius of the Poet; by the simplicity of its conduct, it diminishes the pathos of the fable; and, by the admission of a continued Chorus, prevents that agreeable embarrass, which awakens our attention, and interests our passions.

The universal veneration, which we pay to the name

of Shakespear, at the same time that it has improved our relish for the higher beauties of Poetry, has undoubtedly been the ground-work of all this false criticism. That disregard, which, in compliance merely with the taste of the times, he shewed of all the necessary rules of the drama, hath since been considered as a characteristic of his vast and original genius; and consequently set up as a model for succeeding writers. Hence M. Voltaire remarks very justly, *Que le mérite de cet auteur a perdu le Théatre Anglois. Le tems, qui seul fait la réputation des hommes, rend à la fin, leurs défauts respectables.*

Yet, notwithstanding the absurdity of this low superstition, the notion is so popular amongst Englishmen, that I fear it will never be entirely discredited, till a poet rises up amongst us with a genius as elevated and daring as Shakespear's, and a judgment as sober and chastised as Racine's. But as it seems too long to wait for this prodigy, it will not surely be improper for any one of common talents, who would entertain the public without indulging its caprice, to take the best models of antiquity for his guides; and to adapt those models, as near as may be, to the manners and taste of his own times. Unless he do both, he will, in effect, do nothing. For it cannot be doubted, that the many gross faults of our stage are owing to the complaisance and servility, with which the ordinary run of writers have ever humoured

that illiterate, whimsical, or corrupted age, in which it was their misfortune to be born.

Milton, you will tell me, is a noble exception to this observation. He is so, and would have been a nobler, had he not run into the contrary extreme. The contempt in which, perhaps with justice, he held the age he lived in, prevented him from condescending either to amuse or instruct it. He had, before, given to his unworthy countrymen the noblest Poem that genius, conducted by antient art, could produce; and he had seen them receive it with disregard, if not with dislike. Conscious therefore of his own dignity, and of their demerit, he looked to posterity only for his reward, and to posterity only directed his future labours. Hence it was, perhaps, that he formed his Sampson Agonistes on a model more simple and severe than Athens herself would have demanded; and took Æschylus or his master rather than Sophocles or Euripides; intending by this conduct to put as great a distance as possible between himself and his contemporary writers; and to make his work (as he himself said) *much different from what amongst them passed for the best.* The success of the Poem was accordingly, what one would have expected. The age it appeared in, treated it with total neglect; neither hath that posterity, to which he appealed, and which has done justice to most of his other writings, as yet given to this excellent piece its full

measure of popular and universal fame. Perhaps, in your closet, and that of a few more, who unaffectedly admire genuine nature and antient simplicity, the Agonistes may hold a distinguished rank. Yet, surely, we cannot say (in Hamlet's phrase) "*that it pleases the million.*" It is still "*Caviar to the general.*"

Hence, I think, I may conclude, that unless one would be content with a very late and very learned posterity, Milton's conduct in this point should not be followed. A writer of tragedy must certainly adapt himself more to the general taste; because the dramatic, of all kinds of poetry, ought to be most universally relished and understood. The Lyric Muse addresses herself to the imagination of a reader; the Didactic to his judgment; but the Tragic strikes directly on his passions. Few men have a strength of imagination capable of pursuing the flights of Pindar; many have not a clearness of apprehension suited to the reasonings of Lucretius and Pope: but every man has passions to be excited: and every man feels them excited by Shakespear.

But, though Tragedy be thus chiefly directed to the heart, it must be observed, that it will seldom attain its end without the concurrent approbation of the judgment. And to procure this, the artificial construction of the fable goes a great way. In France, the excellence of their several poets is chiefly measured by this standard.

And amongst our own writers, if you except Shakespear (who indeed ought, for his other virtues, to be exempt from common rules) you will find, that the most regular of their compositions is generally reckoned their *Chef d'œuvre;* witness the *All for Love* of Dryden, the *Venice Preserved* of Otway, and the *Jane Shore* of Rowe.

LETTER III.

The scheme, you proposed in your last, is I own practicable enough. Undoubtedly, most part of the dialogue of the Chorus might be put into the mouth of an Emma or Matilda, who, with some little shew of sisterly concernment, might be easily made to claim kindred with Earl Athelwold. Nay, by the addition of a few unnecessary incidents, which would cost me no more than they are worth in contriving, and an unmeaning personage or two, who would be as little expence in creating, I believe I could quickly make the whole tolerably fit for an English audience.

But for all this I cannot persuade myself to enter upon the task. I have, I know not how (like many of my betters) contracted a kind of veneration for the old Chorus; and am willing to think it essential to the

Tragic drama. You shall hear the reasons that incline me to this judgment. They respect the *Poet* and the *Audience*.

It is agreed, I think, on all hands, that in the conduct of a fable, the admission of a Chorus lays a necessary restraint on the *Poet*. The two Unities of time and place, are esteemed by some of less consequence in our modern Tragedy, than the third Unity of action; but admit a Chorus, and you must, of necessity, restore them to those equal rights, which they antiently enjoyed, and yet claim, by the charter of Aristotle. For the difference, which the use of the Chorus makes, is this: the modern drama contents itself with a fact *represented;* the antient requires it to be *represented before spectators*. Now as it cannot be supposed, that these spectators should accompany the chief personages into private apartments, one single scene, or *unity of place* becomes strictly necessary. And as these spectators are assembled on purpose to observe and bear a part in the action, the *time* of that action becomes, of course, that of the spectacle or representation itself; it being unreasonable to make the spectators attend so long, as the Poet, in bringing about his catastrophe, may require. And this is usually the practice of the antient stage. The modern, on the contrary, regards very little these two capital restraints; and its disuse of the Chorus helps greatly to conceal the absurdity. For the Poet, without offending

so much against the laws of probability, may lead his personages from one part to another of the same palace or city, when they have only a paltry servant or insignificant confidant to attend them. He may think himself at liberty to spend two or three days, months, or even years, in completing his story; to clear the stage at the end, or, if he pleases, in the middle of every act: and, being under no controul of the Chorus, he can break the continuity of the drama, just where he thinks it convenient; and, by the assistance of a brisk fugue and a good violin, can persuade his audience, that as much time has elapsed as his hero's, or rather his own distress, may demand.

Hence it is, that secret intrigues become (as Mr. Dryden gravely calls them) the *beauties of our modern stage*. Hence it is, that incidents, and bustle, and *business*, supply the place of simplicity, nature, and pathos: a happy change, perhaps, for the generality of writers, who might otherwise find it impossible to fill *cette longue carrière de cinq actes*, which a writer, sufficiently experienced in these matters, says, *est si prodigieusement difficile à remplir sans Episodes*.

But whatever these play-makers may have gained by rejecting the Chorus, the true Poet has lost considerably by it. For he has lost a graceful and natural resource to the embellishments of picturesque description, sublime

allegory, and whatever else comes under the denomination of *pure poetry*. Shakespear, indeed, had the power of introducing this naturally, and what is most strange, of joining it with *pure passion*. But I make no doubt, if we had a Tragedy of his formed on the Greek model, we should find in it more frequent, if not nobler instances of his high poetical capacity, than in any single composition he has left us. I think you have a proof of this in those parts of his historical plays, which are called Choruses, and written in the common dialogue metre. And your imagination will easily conceive, how fine an ode, the description of the night preceding the battle of Agincourt, would have made in his hands; and what additional grace it would receive from that form of composition.

With the means of introducing poetry naturally is lost, also, the opportunity of conveying moral reflections with grace and propriety. But this comes more properly under consideration, when I give you my thoughts on the advantage the audience received from a well conducted Chorus.

LETTER IV.

In my last I took no notice of that superior pomp and majesty, which the Chorus necessarily added to the scene of the drama. I made no remarks on the agreeable variety it introduced into the versification and metre; nor shewed how, by uniting the harmony of the lyre to the pomp of the buskin, music became intimately connected with it, and furnished it with all its additional graces. These and many other advantages I might have insisted upon, had I thought them so material as the two I mentioned; the latter of which, namely, its being a proper vehicle for moral and sentiment, is so material, that I think nothing can possibly atone for the loss of it.

In those parts of the drama, where the judgment of a mixt audience is most liable to be misled by what passes before its view, the chief actors are generally too much agitated by the furious passions, or too much attached by the tender ones, to think coolly, and impress on the spectators a moral sentiment properly. A confidant or servant has seldom sense enough to do it, never dignity enough to make it regarded. Instead therefore of these, the ancients were provided with a band of distinguished persons, not merely capable of seeing and hearing, but of arguing, advising, and reflecting; from the leader of

which a moral sentiment never came unnaturally, but suitably and gracefully: and from the troop itself, a poetical flow of tender commiseration, of religious supplication, or of virtuous triumph, was ever ready to heighten the pathos, to inspire a reverential awe of the Deity, and to advance the cause of *honesty* and of truth.

If you ask me, how it augmented the pathetic, I cannot give you a better answer than the *Abbé Vatry* has done in his dissertation on the subject published in the *Mémoires de l' Acad. des Inscr. &c.* " It effected this " (says he) both in its *odes* and *dialogue*. The wonder- " ful power of music and the dance is universally allowed. " And, as these were always *accompaniments* to the " odes, there is no doubt but they contributed greatly to " move the passions. It was necessary that there should " be odes or intermedes; but it was also necessary, that " these intermedes should not suffer the minds of the " audience to cool, but on the contrary, should support " and fortify those passions which the previous scenes " had already excited. Nothing imaginable could pro- " duce this effect better, than the choral songs and " dances, which filled the mind with ideas correspond- " ing to the subject, and never failed to add new force " to the sentiments of the principal personages. In the " dialogue also, the Chorus served to move the passions, " by shewing to the spectators other spectators strongly " affected by the action. A spectacle of such a kind as is

" fitted to excite in us the passions of *terror* and *pity*,
" will not of itself so strongly affect us, as when we see
" others, also, affected by it. The painters have generally
" understood this secret, and have had recourse to an expe-
" dient, similar to that of the Chorus of the poets. Not
" content with the simple representation of an historical
" event, they have also added groups of assistant figures,
" and exprest in their faces the different passions, they
" would have their picture excite. Nay, they sometimes
" enlist into the service even irrational animals. In the
" *slaughter of the Innocents*, Le Brun was not satisfied
" with expressing all the horror, of which the subject is
" naturally capable; he has also painted two horses with
" their hair standing on end, and starting back, as afraid
" to trample upon the bleeding infants. This is an ar-
" tifice which has often been employed, and which has
" always succeeded. A good poet should do the same;
" and Iphigenia should not be suffered to appear on the
" theatre, without being accompanied with persons
" capable of feeling her misfortunes."

Had this ingenious Abbé seen the famous Belisarius of Vandyke, I am apt to believe he would have thought it a much more noble illustration of the matter. The soldier in that piece, though so much condemned by our modern Professors of *Virtù* for being, as they say, the principal figure, is the very thing which raises this picture from a simple portrait (which it must otherwise have

been) to the finest moral painting; and in Greece would have placed the painter amongst that class of artists, which they esteemed the noblest, the ΗΘΟΓΡΑΦΟΙ. The greatest tragic poet could not have raised a more exquisite distress than this judicious painter has done by the attitude of that soldier; as well as by the subordinate figures, which, with great propriety, are female ones, nothing being so likely to raise in a military mind that mixture of pity and disdain, which he wanted to express, as to see such a hero relieved by charity, and that too the charity of girls and old women.

But, returning to my subject, I will just observe to you, that if it be proper to assist an audience in relishing the pathetic, by shewing an imitation of that pathos in the Chorus, it is much more so to instruct them how to be affected properly, with the characters and actions which are represented in the course of the Drama. The character of PIERRE in *Venice Preserved*, when left entirely to the judgment of the audience, is perhaps one of the most improper for public view, that ever was produced on any stage. It is almost impossible, but some part of the spectators should go from the representation with very false and immoral impressions. But had the tragedy been written on the ancient plan; had Pierre's character been drawn just as it is, and some few alterations made in Jaffier's, I know no two characters more capable of doing service in a moral view, when justly

animadverted upon by the Chorus. I don't say, I would have trusted Otway with the writing of it.

To have done, and to release you. Bad characters become on this plan as harmless in the hands of the poet, as the historian; and good ones become infinitely more useful, by how much the poetic is more forcible than the historical mode of instruction.

LETTER V.

The reason, why in a former Letter you advised me to alter the Chorus, is made very apparent in your last. For by persuading me to get the Odes set to music, and to risk the Play on the stage, I understand only that you are willing, any how to make it a more profitable work for me, than it can possibly be by means of the press alone.

Yet certainly, Sir, one single reflection on our British pit will make you change your sentiments effectually. Think only on the trial made by M. Racine, in a nation whose taste for probability and decorum in theatrical diversions is much before ours. In his two last tragedies, you know, he has fully succeeded in the very thing I aimed at; and has adapted a noble imitation of ancient

simplicity to the taste of his own times: particularly in his *Athalia*, a poem, in which the most superb and august spectacle, the most interesting event, and the most sublime flow of inspired poetry, are all nobly and naturally united. Yet I am told, that neither that, nor the *Esther*, retains its Chorus, when represented on the French theatre.

To what is this owing? To the refinement, most certainly, of our modern music. This art is now carried to such a pitch of perfection, or if you will of corruption, as makes it utterly incapable of being an adjunct to poetry. *Il y a grande apparence, que les progrès que vous avez faits dans la musique, ont nui enfin à ceux de la véritable tragédie. C'est un talent, qui a fait tort à un autre;* says M. Voltaire with his usual taste and judgment. Our different cadences, our divisions, variations, repetitions, without which modern music cannot subsist, are entirely improper for the expression of poetry, and were scarce known to the antients.

But could this be managed, the additional expense necessarily attendant on such a performance, would make the matter impracticable. This Mr. Dryden foresaw long ago. The passage is curious.

"A new theatre, much more ample and much deeper, "must be made for that purpose; besides the cost of "sometimes forty or fifty habits: which is an expense

" too large to be supplied by a company of actors. It is " true, I should not be sorry to see a *Chorus* on a theatre, " more than as large and as deep again as ours, built " and adorned at a King's charges; and on that condi- " tion, and another, which is, that my hands were not " bound behind me, as now they are, I should not de- " spair of making such *a tragedy* as might be both *in-* " *structive* and *delightful* according to the *manner* of " the Grecians." What he means by having *his hands bound*, I imagine, is, that he was either engaged to his subscribers for a translation of Virgil, or to the manager of the theatre for so many plays a season. This suffrage of Mr. Dryden is, however, very apposite to the present point. It serves, also, to vindicate my design of imitating the Greek Drama. For if he, who was so prejudiced to the modern stage, as to think intrigue a capital beauty in it; if he, I say, owns that the grand secret *prodesse et delectare* was the characteristic of the Greek Drama only, nothing can better justify my present attempt than the approbation he gives to it in this passage.

Having now settled with you all matters of general criticism, I hope in your next you will give me your objections to *scenes*, *speeches*, *images*, &c. And be assured I shall treat your judgment in these matters with greater deference, than I have done in what related to the stage and the Chorus.

Pembroke Hall, 1751.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

ILLUSTRATIONS.*

Page 82. Ver. 16.

On the left

Reside the † Sages skill'd in Nature's lore:

† *i. e.* The Euvates; one of the three classes of the Druids, according to Am. Marcellinus. Studia liberalium doctrinarum inchoata per Bardos, Euvates, et Druidas. This class, Strabo tells us, had the care of the sacrifices, and studied natural philosophy; which here, by *the changeful universe,* is shown to be on Pythagorean principles. Whenever the *priests* are mentioned in the subsequent parts of the Drama, this order of men is intended to be meant, as distinguished from the Druids and Bards.

Page 87. Ver. 12.

Thou shalt live;

Yet shalt thou live an interdicted wretch,

All rights of nature cancell'd.

Alluding to the Druidical power of excommunication

NOTE.

* The above quotations, from antient authors, are here thrown together, in order to support and explain some passages in the Drama of CARACTACUS, that respect the manners of the Druids; and which, the general account of their customs, to be found in our histories of Britain, does not include.

mentioned by Cæsar. Si quis aut privatus, aut publicus, eorum decreto non stetit, sacrificiis interdicunt. Hæc pœna apud eos est gravissima. Quibus ita est interdictum, ii numero impiorum ac sceleratorum habentur—neque iis petentibus jus redditur, neque honos ullus communicatur. Cæs. Com. Lib. VI.

Page 90. Ver. 15.

Are the milk-white steers prepar'd?

In the minute description which Pliny gives us of the ceremony of gathering the misletoe, he tells us, they sacrificed two white bulls. See Pliny's Natural History, L. XVI. c. 44, which Drayton, in his Polyolbion, thus versifies:

Sometimes within my shades, in many an ancient wood,
Whose often-twined tops great Phœbus' fires withstood,
The fearless British priest, under an aged oak,
Taking a milk-white bull, unstrained with the yoke,
And with an axe of gold, from that Jove-sacred tree
The misletoe cut down; then with a bended knee
On th' unhew'd altar laid, put-to the hallow'd fires;
And whilst in the sharp flame the trembling flesh expires,
As their strong fury mov'd (when all the rest adore)
Pronouncing their desires the sacrifice before,
Up to th' eternal Heav'n their bloodied hands did rear:
And whilst the murm'ring woods ev'n shudder'd as with fear,
Preach'd to the beardless youth the soul's immortal state;
To other bodies still how it should transmigrate,
That to contempt of death them strongly did excite.

Page 91. Ver. 8.

Where our matron sister dwells.

The existence of female Druids seems ascertained by Tacitus, in his description of the final destruction of Mona by Paulinus Suetonius. Stabat pro litore diversa acies densa armis virisque, *intercursantibus fœminis*, &c. Also by the known story of Dioclesian, on which Fletcher formed a play, called the Prophetess.

Page 91. Ver. 11.

And the potent adder stone.

The ovum anguinum, or serpent's egg; a famous Druidical amulet, thus circumstantially described by Pliny.—Præterea est ovorum genus in magna Galliarum fama, omissum Græcis. Angues innumeri æstate convoluti, salivis faucium corporumque spumis artifici complexu glomerantur; Anguinum appellatur. Druidæ sibilis id dicunt in sublime jactari, sagoque oportere intercipi, ne tellurem attingat. Profugere raptorem equo, serpentes enim insequi, donec arceantur, amnis alicujus interventu, &c. Nat. Hist. l. xxix. c. 3.

There are remains of this superstition still, both in the northern and western parts of our island. For Lhwyd, the author of the Archæologia, writes thus to Rowland; see Mona Antiqua, p. 338. "The Druid doctrine about "the *Glain Neidr*, obtains very much through all Scot- "land, as well lowlands as highlands; but there is not "a word of it in this kingdom (Ireland); where, as there "are no snakes, they could not propagate it. Besides

" snakes-stones, the highlanders have their snail-stones, " paddock-stones, &c. to all which they attribute their " several virtues, and wear them as amulets." And in another letter he writes, " The Cornish retain variety of " charms, and have still, towards the land's end, the " amulet of Maen Magal, and Glain Neidr, which latter " they call a Milpreu, or Melpreu, and have a charm " for the snake to make it, when they have found one " asleep, and struck a hazel wand in the centre of her " spires."

Page 106. Ver. 17.

Have the milk-white steeds
Unrein'd, and, neighing, pranc'd with fav'ring steps?

The few and imperfect accounts antiquity gives us of ceremonies, &c. which are unquestionably Druidical, make it necessary in this, and in other places of the Drama, to have recourse to Tacitus's account of the Germans; amongst whom, if there were really no established Druids, there was certainly a great correspondency, in religious opinions, with the Gauls and Britons. The passage here alluded to, is taken from his 10th chapter. Proprium gentis, equorumque quoque præsagia ac monitus experiri. Publicè aluntur iisdem nemoribus ac lucis, candidi et nullo mortali opere contacti, quos pressos sacro curru, sacerdos ac rex, vel princeps civitatis comitantur, hinnitus et fremitus observant, nec ulli auspicio major fides non solum apud plebem, sed apud proceres, apud sacerdotes.

Page 107. Ver. 16.

Thou art a king, a sov'reign o'er frail man;
I am a Druid, servant of the gods:
Such service is above such sov'reignty.

The supreme authority of the Druids over their kings, is thus ascertained by Dion Chrysostom.—Κελτοὶ δὲ οὓς ὀνομάζεσι Δρυίδας, καὶ τέτες περὶ Μανλικὴν ὕλας, καὶ τὴν ἄλλην σοφίαν ὧν ἄνευ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν οὐδὲν ἐξῆν πράτλειν, οὐδὲ βελεύεσθαι, ὥσε τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς ἐκείνες ἄρχειν, τοὺς δὲ βασιλέας, αὐτῶν ὑπηρέτας καὶ διακόνους γίγνεσθαι τῆς γνώμης, ἐν θρόνοις χρυσοῖς καθημένες, καὶ οἰκίας μεγάλας οἰκοῦλας, καὶ πολυτίμως εὐωχεμένες. Helmodus also de Slavis, l. ii. c. 12, asserts, Rex apud eos modicæ est æstimationis in comparatione Flaminis.

Page 108. Ver. 10.

The time will come, when Destiny and Death,
Thron'd in a burning car——

Strabo, and other writers, tell us, the Druids taught, that the world was finally to be destroyed by fire; upon which this allegory is founded.

Page 116. Ver. 10.

The gods, my brethren,
Have wak'd these doubts in the untainted breast
Of this mild maiden.

Inesse enim sanctum quid et providum fœminis putant. Nec aut consilia ipsorum aspernantur, aut responsa

negant. Tac. de morib. Germ. And Strabo to the like purpose, l. vii. Ἅπαντες γὰρ τῆς δεισιδαιμονίας ἀρχηγὲς οἴονται τὰς γυναῖκας.

Page 121. Ver. 5.

Behold yon huge
And unhewn sphere of living adamant.

This is meant to describe the rocking-stone, of which there are several still to be seen in Wales, Cornwall, and Derbyshire. They are universally supposed, by antiquarians, to be Druid monuments; and Mr. Toland thinks, "that the Druids made the people believe that "they only could move them, and that by a miracle, by "which they condemned or acquitted the accused, and "often brought criminals to confess what could in no "other way be extorted from them." It was this conjecture which gave the hint for this piece of machinery. The reader may find a description of one of these rocking-stones in Camden's Britannia, in his account of Pembrokeshire; and also several in Borlase's History of Cornwall.

Page 148. Ver. 4.

———*And its name*

Trifingus.

The name of the enchanted sword in the *Hervara Saga*.

Page 148. Ver. 11.

By the bright circle of the golden sun.

This adjuration is taken from the literal form of the

old Druidical oath, which they administered to their disciples: and which the learned Selden, in Prolog. de Diis Syr. gives us from Vettius Valens Antiochenus, l. vii. It is as follows: Τὰς ταῖς παραγγελίαις ἡμῶν πειθομένας ὁρκίζω ΗΛΙΟΥ μὲν ἱερον κύκλον καὶ ΣΕΛΗΝΗΣ ἀνωμάλας δρόμους, τῶν τε λοιπῶν ΑΣΤΕΡΩΝ δυνάμεις καὶ κύκλον ΔΥΟΚΑΙΔΕΚΑ ΖΩΔΙΩΝ, ἐν ἀποκρύφοις ταῦτα ἔχειν, καὶ τοῖς ἀπαιδεύτοις ἢ ἀμυήτοις μὴ μεταδιδόναι, τίμην τε καὶ μνήμην τῷ εἰσηγησαμένῳ ἀπονέμειν, &c.

Page 157. Ver. 2.

Near each a white-rob'd Druid, whose stern voice
Thunder'd deep execrations on the foe.

This account is taken from what history tells us did really happen some years after, when the groves of Mona were destroyed by Suetonius Paulinus. Igitur Monam insulam incolis validam, et receptaculum perfugarum aggredi parat, navesque fabricatur plano alveo, adversus breve litus et incertum. Sic Pedes; equites vado secuti, aut altiores inter undas, adnantes equis transmisere. Stabat pro litore diversa acies densa armis virisque, intercursantibus fœminis: in modum Furiarum, veste ferali crinibus dejectis *faces* præferebant. Druidæ circum, preces diras sublatis ad cœlum manibus fundentes, novitate aspectus perculere milites ut, quasi hærentibus membris, immobile corpus vulneribus præberent. Dein cohortationibus ducis, et se ipsi stimulantes ne muliebre

et fanaticum agmen pavescerent, inferunt signa, sternuntque obvios et igni suo involvunt. Tac. Ann. l. xiv. c. 29.

Page 160. Ver. 3.

O think not, King,
That Mona shall be curst by these dire rites !

This and the four following speeches to the end of the scene were printed in the first edition of this Poem, but cancelled before publication; because some of my critical friends thought them not supported by historical authority: Yet as they add to the consistency and dignity of the Druidical character as delineated through the rest of the Drama, and give them an air of propriety and consequently of probability, I have chosen in this edition to reinstate them.

Page 168. Ver. 7.

The shapeless symbols of your barbarous gods.

The Druids did not really worship the divinity under any symbol. But this is put intentionally into the mouth of the Roman, as mistaking the rude stones placed round the grove, for idols. Thus Lucan in his beautiful description of a Druid grove,

———simulacraque mœsta deorum
Arte carent, cæsisque extant informia truncis.

Phar. Lib. iii.

Some imagery from the same description is also borrowed in the opening of the Drama.

Page 172. Ver. 22.

——— *Soldier, I had arms.*

This passage, and some others in this scene, are taken from Caractacus's famous speech in Tacitus, before the throne of Claudius; but here adapted to his dramatic character.

ARGENTILE AND CURAN:

A

LEGENDARY DRAMA.

IN FIVE ACTS.

WRITTEN

ON THE OLD ENGLISH MODEL.

ABOUT THE YEAR 1766.

This is nor Comedy nor Tragedy
Nor Historie.

Beaumont and Fletcher's Prologue to the Captain.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

MEN.

King ADELBRIGHT, } Joint Sovereigns of Bernicia and
King EDEL, } Dëira.

CURAN, Prince of Denmark.

SEWOLD, the Danish Envoy.

OSWALD, a Saxon Earl.

EDWIN, his Son.

The PRIOR of Whitby Abbey.

TWO SAXON LORDS.

The KING'S FALCONER.

RALPH, his Deputy.

A DANISH OFFICER.

MONKS and NUNS of Whitby Abbey, Attendants, &c.

WOMEN.

ARGENTILE, Daughter of King ADELBRIGHT.

EDITHA, her Attendant.

The SCENE, some time in and about the Castle of Whitby, afterwards in the Valley of Hackness.

The Story is taken from an old narrative Poem, called ALBION'S ENGLAND, written by W. WARNER, and it is to be found in Dr. PERCY'S Reliques of ancient English Poetry, Vol. II. p. 233, first edition; but is here much more altered, than was customary with our old Dramatists.

ARGENTILE AND CURAN.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The great Hall in the Castle of Whitby. Enter a solemn Procession of the Prior, Monks, and Sisterhood of St. Hilda's Abbey, before King Adelbright, who is borne in a Chair of State, sick; King Edel, the Princess Argentile, Lord Oswald, and other Courtiers attending. The Monks and Nuns sing the following Dirge.

CHORUS.

HOLY HILDA! hear, and aid,
While our aged King we bear
To thy shrine, thou sainted Maid,
HILDA holy, aid, and hear!

A Monk. He, whose head a crown invested,
Bows to thee that dying head;
Be his truth in Heav'n attested,
Holy HILDA, hear, and aid!*

A Nun. He, whose hands a sceptre wielded,
Lifts to thee those hands in pray'r;

NOTE.

* The last line repeated in Chorus in every subsequent stanza.

Be his soul from danger shielded,
HILDA holy, aid, and hear!
Prior. Faith doth lead him to thy altar,
There his languid limbs to spread,
If in prayer his accents falter,
Holy HILDA, hear, and aid!
A Monk. Waft to Heav'n each faint petition
In seraphic accents clear;
Pleas'd perform that blest commission;
HILDA holy, aid, and hear!
A Nun. And, when Death shall free his spirit,
Snatch it from the furnace red;
Bid it endless bliss inherit;
Holy HILDA, hear, and aid!

[*The Dirge ended, King Adelbright is brought forward to the middle of the Stage.*]

ADELBRIGHT.

Yet bear me forward; now set down your burthen;
And stand, I pray ye, from me, that the air
Have readier passage to my labouring breast.
Ed. How fares our brother now?
Ad. In sooth, King EDEL,
Death lays that iron mace upon this shoulder
That oft has quell'd a stouter; some few hours
And he will chill what little blood still creeps
In these lank veins. Nay, do not weep, my sweet,
My gentle ARGENTILE; thy Father, child,
Is going but to where his went before him,

And whither thou, and all, when Heav'n so wills,
Must follow him; yet goes he full of days,
And full of, what this oft misdeeming world
Calls, honour; yet, if honour'd false, I trust
Still unreproach'd; for so his conscience whispers,
And in a voice as soothing as the sound
Of this sweet minstrelsy: Do not then weep.
For tho' thy Father leaves thee, ARGENTILE;
Not fatherless he leaves thee; trust me, child,
While this good man, our kingly brother, lives,
Thou ne'er wilt want a father.

Ed. By the rood
There borne, that hallow'd rood——

[*Pointing to one of the Crosses borne in the Procession.*

Ad. No oath, King EDEL,
'Twere here sworn needlessly; couldst thou be false,
As sure thou canst not in some lighter cause,
This, in itself, bears its own pledge of faith.
For ARGENTILE is of that courteous kind,
So all made up of dove-like gentleness,
The veriest churl, if brib'd to do her wrong,
Would inly yearn, and, his remorseful heart
Turn truant to his purpose.—Still thou weep'st—

[*To Argentile.*

Arg. That do I, Sir, and must; yet not from fear
(I trust my uncle gives my words belief)
That he should treat me (you, Sir, with the blest)

Other than kindly; yet I weep, and must,
To see, what shortly I must see no more,
A father, fondest of all fathers, give
His dying moments to his daughter's weal.
And must I lose him? Heav'n!

Ad. Such is Heav'n's will;
And, to its high and uncontroll'd behests,
Let all like me give the prostration meet
Of heart, as well as head. Yet will I own
(Had it so pleas'd the giver of all good)
I could have wish'd, or e'er I left thee, child,
To have affixt, with my own hand, the signet
Unto that nuptial treaty which consigns thee
To Denmark's youthful heir; this to confirm
Ev'n now an embassy is on the seas,
If not within our ports.

Arg. In luckless time
Surely it comes; is this a time to think
Of love, or marriage?

Ad. Dearest ARGENTILE,
Pray thee forbear to interrupt my speech;
Words now are precious to me. With thee, Brother,
I leave this weighty business. Be it thine
To see our daughter, with the royal dower
That I have left, wedded to Denmark's heir.
To which, if, on thy part, it shall thee please
To add such feoffs as may beseem the worth
Of fair Dëira, reign thou then sole king

Of all Northumberland; and she, with dower
Thus amplified by thee, shall hence to Denmark.
But, if thou mak'st election still to rule
With sway united, we do trust the Dane,
If fame belies not his fair qualities,
Will prove to thee a son, his queen thy daughter;
So shall, in both, the loss be recompens'd
Of us, thy loving brother.

Ed. ADELBRIGHT,

So mercy shield me as I rest well-pleas'd
With this sweet princess, and the royal Dane,
Jointly to rule Bernicia, and Dëira.

Ad. We like it well; and in full proof we do,
See, to thy hands we trust this peerless gem,
Soul of our soul, our gentle ARGENTILE.
Now let her kneel before me, while these palms
On her dear head seal my last blessing. " Hear,
" Thou Virgin pure! hear, Queen of highest Heav'n,
" A father's earnest prayer! O bless my child
" With length of days, and not one day be dimm'd
" With lack of honour! may the realm she rules,
" In right of me, be blest, and she by it;
" Ev'n by th' allegiance of a well-rul'd people!—
Prior of Whitby, now, all that remain'd
Of worldly care is finish'd; what few hours
Of life are left to Heav'n we consecrate,
And holy rites; bear me, my chamberlains,
Unto the Abbey. ARGENTILE, King EDEL,

Oswald attend us to the chauntry steps;
And there farewell; then, at St. Hilda's shrine,
These holy men shall spread my dying limbs,
And sing my requiem; for, at that high shrine,
Old Adelbright doth wish to breathe his last.

[*Exeunt the King borne, Edel, &c. attending, the Choir repeating the Dirge.*

Manent two LORDS.

F. Lord. Go, and Heav'n's holiest band of Saints receive thee!
Go, for the goodliest piece of majesty
That ever blest Dëira. Yet, methinks,
Old as thou art, thou dost too hastily
Make this devotement of thy soul to Heav'n.
Had I been thee, ev'n to life's latest gasp
This act had been delay'd, however holy;
If, by such lett, fair Argentile might gain
A surer tenure in her father's rights
Than lip-security.

S. Lord. Do others also
Nourish suspicious doubts? Beshrew me, Lord,
But I was giv'n to hope the yellow fiend
Haunted me singly; nay, was prompt to chide
My brain for giving the base inmate harbour.

F. Lord. Nay, my good Lord, suspicions like to thine
Be but too rife; a mean clerk he must be,
Who cannot spell so much i' th' page of man
As may afford him scope to comment grossly

On EDEL's late demeanour; and, from thence,
To frame sad forecast of what soon may turn
To this poor realm's mishap. This he may do,
And be no prophet neither.

S. Lord. Certes, Sir,
Since good King ADELBRIGHT took to his chamber,
His brother, vested with the double purple,
Did teach that robe to puff and swell about him
Ev'n to a tyrant size.—But, see, here comes
Lord OSWALD, and his honest eye doth borrow
Enough of the hawk's keenness, I not doubt,
To see as far as we do, haply further,
In this black prospect. Health to noble OSWALD!

Enter OSWALD.

Osw. Now mercy shield me, friends, from so much shriving.
What with their vigils, penances, and bead-work,
These priests have worn out our old master sooner
Than he that made him meant. Call a physician,
He'll let your soul alone; let him but plague
Your body, he, good leach, rests satisfied.
But, if you trust a monk with your soul's cure,
Trust me, not soul alone but body pays for it.

F. Lord. Shrewdly remark'd; but say, my noble Lord,
How left ye the good king?

Osw. Ev'n as I tell you,
O'erdone with sanctity. Hast thou ne'er seen
A steed of generous blood, when overweighted,

Lag ere his latest stage, which, but for that,
Had paced with spirit to his journey's end,
And neigh'd at his ungirthing? Sirs, I left him,
Just where he bade us, at the chauntry steps;
The lovely princess, over-charg'd with grief,
Was led in private, thro' the garden postern,
Back to the castle by her now step-father.
Pray Heav'n, his sex may make him 'scape the proverb.

S. Lord. That little word, good Earl, which now you drop
Gives us to think your fears do square with ours,
Ev'n but too nicely.

Osw. What, for quoting ye
A thread-bare proverb! Troth a pleasant jest.
What, are all step-things curst! my gallants twain,
I find my tongue must wear a closer curb
Whene'er I let it amble in your purlieus.

S. Lord. There is no need.

Osw. Nay, be there need, or not,
I scarce shall have the caution. I have ever
Giv'n forth my free thoughts freely, and am now
Too old for closer training. Take then, Sirs,
My mind unmask'd. I do indeed distrust
Our now sole master, with a phlegm as fixt,
As e'er a subject did.

F. Lord. And I.

S. Lord. And I.

Osw. And many more, I trust, right honest men,

Not present at our parley; for myself
Thus far conceive me, I shall closely watch
King Edel's 'haviour; and, if I perceive
From his bleak quarter comes that blighting wind
May nip the blossom'd hopes of Argentile,
I'll be that broad old oak shall shield them from it.

F. Lord. So doing, noble Oswald, thou wilt prove
Thou hold'st the memory of our good old master
As dear, as, when alive, thou held'st his person.

Osw. My friends, I lov'd my good king fervently;
These salt tears speak it, for they course down cheeks
Not wont to find them channels, but at times
When the moist dew becomes them. Nature made me
Of her mixt metal, but I trust no base one,
Much more of steel, than silver; yet of this
Enough for honest pliancy; but not
To spin me out, as wire, just as you list.
For tho' you see me now like very wax,
Yet, strive to mould me to a traytor shape,
I'll break before I bend; thus of himself
Old Oswald boasts, and, tho' himself's the boaster,
He wrongs him that mistrusts him. Sirs, farewell.

SCENE II.

Changes to a state apartment in the Castle, enter King Edel leading in the Princess Argentile.

EDEL.

Enough of tears, fair ARGENTILE, enough.

Arg. Never enough, my Lord, when such the cause.

Ed. If so, I fear me that the smiles will come
Full tardily, which my parental fondness
Shall hourly plead for.

Arg. Gratitude, good uncle,
Can dwell with sorrow. Nay, in that same eye,
Where she sits bath'd in tears, can dart a gleam
Will brighten all the face as it were joy,
And yet keep weeping still. I've mark'd it oft
In many a sorrowing maid, whom I have cheer'd,
And wept to see it so, and that too cheer'd them.
Please you, my Lord, I'll to my chamber; there
Kind EDITHA will give that comfort to me,
Which grief best loves, a sigh of sympathy.

[*Exit Argentile.*

Ed. (solus.) I much suspect me this same simple maid,
Young as she is, and surely all unredde
In the world's craft, doth nourish doubts within her

Touching my tenderness; why, be it so;
I must not for the pulings of a girl
Forego my heart's high purpose; how now, Usher

Enter an USHER.

Ush. The Prior comes, and craves admittance, Sire.

Ed. Admit him, and, as thou dost dread our frown,
Ward off whate'er may interrupt our converse.

[*Exit Usher.*

Enter the PRIOR.

How fares our brother now?

Pri. He seems, my Sov'reign,
To death no nearer now, than some hours past,
Perchance, or days. He thought, as he approach'd
St. HILDA's shrine, a genial heat spread o'er him
Which cheer'd him much; whether the hidden powers
Salubrious, that in those chaste reliques dwell,
(For many have they heal'd) or whether nature,
Struggling within, had gain'd some little 'vantage—

Ed. I pray thee, PRIOR, spare me thy surmises.
Thou sayest he lives, think'st thou it possible
He should live long?

Pri. That Heav'n's high Queen best knows;
Yet, if he should, his vital force so spent,
It were a miracle, and ought to bring
No vulgar off'rings to our hallow'd shrine.

Ed. True to his trade, I find the greedy Priest
Looks out for more oblations. I have means
Surer than these to wind him to my purpose. *(Aside.)*

But give me, holy man, thy very thought
Touching the nature of his malady.

Pri. 'Tis seated in his breast; for lack of spring,
His lungs play heavily.

Ed. With such an ailment,
Many have struggled long.

Pri. And so may he;
But the thick air, breath'd in this peopled town,
Is poison in his case. The cold dense fogs,
We borrow from the sea, our briny neighbour,
Alike augment his danger; were he mov'd
To some wide inland vale—

Ed. We know thy meaning,
And much approve it; but we fear, if helpt
By such removal, he will ne'er be cur'd,
Nor fit again to steer the helm of state.

Pri. That, good my Liege, he will not. Other cares,
Of weightiest import to his after peace,
Have long possest him; I, and all that wish
Weal to his better part, can never hope it.

Ed. Good man! I think thou dost not.

Pri. No, my Sov'reign,
Your younger hands, helpt by your bolder head,
Will abler rein a nation, so stiff-neck'd
As this, that Providence now bids you rule.

Ed. We know not that; we know but our good meaning,
Not our ability. But this we know,
That, tho' our brother was in very deed

A nursing father to our holy church,
We will not be behind him in that duty.
Nay we will soon shew this by one bold act
Which he, from feebleness of spirit, fail'd in.

Pri. As how, my Liege?

Ed. Mark well my words, good PRIOR,
Thou know'st the prelate proud of Canterbury
Doth hold a jurisdiction in these realms,
Which, as of right, pertains to the see of York.

Pri. I know, and much lament it, gracious Sir.

Ed. The Pope doth favour Canterbury's claim,
And mitred York submits to his behests;
So did our brother too; but EDEL scorns
Such mean submission, and will soon depose
York's recreant Bishop, and his pastoral staff,
With ample powers o'er all Northumberland,
Give to thy surer grasp.

Pri. Your humble beadsman
Is bound, for aye, to crook his aged knee—
Not that I wish—to the high task unequal,
Such proud advancement. What befits the weal
Of holy church, you, and the saints best know.

Ed. Of this enough at present. To thy care
We trust our brother. But of this take heed,
That none approach him, save thyself, and those
Thou may'st securely trust. Spread too the rumour
That he is dead, and, after fitting space,
Announce his burial; he himself did chuse

Private interment; this will give it credit.
To-morrow, if thou find'st his health still better,
Give me the news. We then will take thy council
Touching his change of place.

Pri. What if, my Liege,
The better to relieve both soul and body,
We lead him to religious solitude?
His frame of mind will meet us in that matter.

Ed. It may be well; we'll speak of that hereafter,
But know at present this; each pious art,
That makes of him a saint, makes me thy friend.

Enter USHER.

How now? did we not will we should be private?

Ush. SEWOLD, ambassador from Royal Denmark,
Demands an audience.

Ed. He doth come full soon:
Yet am I now prepar'd to give him audience.
Admit the Dane. PRIOR, good speed to thee.

[*Exit Prior.*

[*King Edel seats himself in a Chair of State; a short flourish of trumpets. Enter Sewold between two Heralds bearing on their breasts for device the Danish raven. Prince Curan in disguise enters with the rest of the train.*]

EDEL.

My Lord Ambassador we greet you well.
Yet, ere ye open your commission to us,
(Of which we wot the purport) it behoves us
To tell you, what the cloud upon our brow
Speaks but too plain, our royal brother's dead.

Sew. Landing, dread Sir, news met us of his sickness.

Ed. That sickness was death's harbinger. This known,
We need not add you come in luckless time,
A time, which neither from the piercing grief
That rends our soul, nor for the meet respect
We owe his obsequies, will suffer us
To turn unto that business, which from Denmark
Ye have in charge.

Sew. Due decency forbid,
Much as my Sov'reign wishes to complete
The treaty, that his envoy should, with haste
Unseemly, press it. If it please your Highness,
We patiently will sojourn here some days,
And wait the fit occasion. Meanwhile, Sir,
Think me not rude, if I request an audience
Of princely ARGENTILE, I, and my train;
That, in the name of Denmark and his heir,
We, to her grief, may that condolence give
Our mutual loss demands.

Ed. Now out, alas!
Our niece is ev'n a martyr to her sorrow
The lily, broken by the pelting hail,
Is not more sorely shent than ARGENTILE,
Yet say it were not so, our open nature,
For frankness we do hold a King's best virtue
Prompts us to tell you we have scruples Dane,
Touching these nuptials; nay, for why should we
Mask our true thoughts? we have much more than scruples,

A well-weigh'd judgment, and by that pronounce
Our niece of age too tender yet for marriage.

Sew. Dread Sir, your kingly brother thought not so,
But, of his own first thought, did urge the alliance
To yielding Denmark.

Ed. We admit he did,
Yet was his daughter all averse to nuptials,
And is so still. That daughter, by his death,
Is now our tenderest charge. To thwart her wishes
At such a time, nay, when these wishes speak
With the soft voice of virgin chastity,
Would ill become an uncle that reveres,
And loves her virtues.

Sew. Surely royal EDEL—

Ed. Bear with us, Lord Ambassador, we cannot
Enter at full on all those weighty causes,
That now oblige us to curtail your audience:
Take our best thoughts in sum. On our true faith
We honour Denmark much, and much do wish
A firm alliance with his Sov'reignty.
This to insure, we know the match in question
Is a firm tye; if therefore in a year,
Or rather twain, he chuses to repeat
This embassy.

Sew. Now by the hopes of Denmark,
The Prince, his son ——

Ed. Is but some eighteen past,
And well may give the truce, that we demand,

To our young niece's coyness. This besides,
Know, we have many other cogent reasons
Here all unsaid, which, when our brother Denmark
Is well appriz'd of, we do nothing doubt
He'll praise our prudence. These, in ample sort,
Soon will we set forth in a fair memorial,
And send unto his court. Blame not our briefness,
The weight of two wide kingdoms resting on us
Must plead our full excuse. Most noble Envoy,
Our seneschalls have it in charge to treat you
As fits your quality; ourselves, alas,
Are all unable, in our present sorrows,
To give you festive greeting. Sir, commend us
To royal Denmark; and a prosperous gale
Spread your returning sails. [*Exit Edel and train.*

Manent SEWOLD *and* CURAN.

[*Who comes forward hastily from the Attendants of the Embassy.*]

CURAN.

By all my ancestors,
I will not hence, till this imperious King
Permit I see the Princess.

Sew. Gracious Sir,
Vent not in such loud tone your just displeasure,
Should we be noted.

Cur. Does he think that CURAN,
Ev'n for that honour, which he owes his country,
Will bear th' indignity; not see the Princess!

Tyrant, I will! for therefore came I hither;
And Denmark ne'er shall call that errand thriftless,
For which her prince disguis'd him like a peasant.

Sew. Yet hear me, CURAN, or a speedy ruin—

Cur. What ruin? SEWOLD, I will own myself
The heir of Denmark, can he then refuse
An instant audience?

Sew. Ah, rash Prince, bethink thee
Wherefore thou art disguis'd; is't not to hide
The heir of Denmark? rightly didst thou doubt,
That, fair as fame blazons this virgin's charms,
The blazon might be false; therefore this masking,
That thou unnotic'd might'st behold the Princess,
And pass thy own true judgment on her charms.
The veil thrown off, thou throw'st away its use;
And must, perforce, ev'n if she prove most homely,
Proceed to nuptial union; as a Prince
Thou canst not then recede.

Cur. SEWOLD, I can;
He sets me the example.

Sew. Hapless youth!
Have I then all in vain pour'd on thine ear
The love of honour, that, with virtuous thirst,
Still drank it gladly? Has my moral pencil
So oft portray'd the forms of truth and falshood,
In their just lineaments, to thy mind's eye;
And hast thou lov'd the one, and scorn'd the other,
Unbid, save by the voice that bade within?

Thou know'st thou hast; say then, shall one example,
Base as it is, and as thou feel'st it is,
Undo?—

Cur. Ah, spare me, SEWOLD, spare the rest,
And let the blush, that tingles on my cheek,
Implore thy pardon. I forgot myself;
Forgot that thou, my master, and my friend,
Heard the rash word—I am myself again.
Yet, SEWOLD, ere we go, means must be found
To see the Princess.

Sew. After such affront
Cast on the absent Majesty of Denmark—

Cur. Nay, SEWOLD, now thy reason, in its turn,
Meets the mad shock of passion; EDEL's fault
Leaves his niece blameless.

Sew. True; and could it be
That, ere we left th' inhospitable shore,
A fit occasion offer'd, I should wish
Thine eye might make of her its wish'd decision:
That so each nation might, from speedy broils,
Perhaps, be freed; for, prove she common fair,
As is the general lot of half her sex,
I trust thou wouldst not pay, for such a Queen,
A single subject's life.

Cur. But if she prove
That paragon of charms, that bright-ey'd phœnix,
Which rumour paints her, I will make this Saxon

Produce me other pleas than tender age,
To step between her beauty and my love.
Sew. What, Prince, if we retire? and near our ships
Rest us encamp'd till her dead father's bones
Be solemnly inhum'd.
Cur. A public audience,
I think, King EDEL ever will refuse.
Sew. And so think I.
Cur. I have a plan, my SEWOLD;
Give it thy patient hearing. In this garb
No Saxon can suspect my quality.
Go thou unto the fleet, while I wait here,
And make my way t' her presence as a page.
Or rather—yes, that is the likelier plot,
I'll change my garb with my young minstrel Rolland;
Thou know'st I can so touch our Danish harp,
As by my practis'd skill to gain her ear.
Is't not a likely plot?
Sew. What, leave my Prince
With strangers, and, if all like EDEL, foes?
Cur. Thou dost not leave thy Prince, too wary SEWOLD,
Thou leav'st a minstrel; and what land so savage,
Where minstrels cannot practise their lov'd art
In honour'd safety? All men hold them sacred;
Thy office hardly more so. This besides,
Bethink thee of those truths, thyself hast taught me,

When, in thy lecture, as was oft thy wont,
Thou weigh'dst, in wisdom's balance, what the poize
Of princely, and of peasant happiness.
In one bright scale lay riches, pomp, and power;
In th' other, health, content, and quiet slumbers.
On that side, poisons, plots, assassinations;
On this, security and careless ease.
These last are now my lot. I'm the safe peasant;
And mean to prove, by fair experiment,
That thy sage saws were true. Nay, my best SEWOLD,
If thou forbid'st me use that good discretion,
Thy schooling taught me, I must say thou think'st
I am no docile pupil.

Sew. Dearest Prince,
It is my joy, my pride, that I have taught thee
To cope with difficulties greater far
Than this may seem: for as experience taught me,
How seldom princes know to act like men,
I've shewn thee what man is: and therefore led thee
Thro' many an unfrequented path of life,
That greatness scantly wots of: bade thee mark
That plain unsightly plant, call'd Human Nature,
When sprouting forth spontaneous; how far culture
Improves its form; and what the force of art
To call forth its best bloom. How too that art,
Like a too rank and too nutricious soil,
Oft marrs its purpose, turning to vain leaf
What else had borne a plenteous crop of virtues.

These truths to learn, the best the world can teach,
We've pac'd thro' cities, villages, and forests,
Sometimes a pilgrim I, with cockled hat,
And thou the stripling bearer of my wallet.

Cur. And, in such masking, own to me, my SEWOLD,
Did I e'er fail to play the part thou bad'st me?

Sew. In sooth thou didst not.

Cur. Therefore, holy pilgrim,
Suppose me now gone a short stone's cast from thee,
To crave an alms at some fat yeoman's porch.
" A mite for charity! give you good den,
" A mite for sweet St. Bridget! My old father,
" A pilgrim worn with penances to shrines,
" Half spent with journeying, lies in yonder dell.
" God's Mother shield you! give an oaten crust
" To break our craving fasts," why this is all
The danger, if you leave me in this castle.

Sew. Delicate Prince, I own there is not much;
Train'd as thou art, there is not much, I think,
I here may leave thee safely. But not long—

Cur. But for two little days, perhaps but one.

Sew. And where shall I await thee?

Cur. My best SEWOLD,
Thou know'st, when we did quit our anchor'd barks,
We crost a pleasant valley; rather say
A nest of sister vales, o'erhung with hills
Of varied form and foliage; every vale
Had its own proper brook, the which it hugg'd

In its green breast, as if it fear'd to lose
The treasur'd chrystal. You might mark the course
Of these cool rills more by the ear, than eye;
For, tho' they oft would to the sun unfold
Their silver as they past, 'twas quickly lost;
But ever did they murmur. On the verge
Of one of these clear streams there stood a cell
O'ergrown with moss, and ivy; near to which,
On a fall'n trunk, that bridg'd the little brook,
A hermit sat. Of him we ask'd the name
Of that sweet valley, and he call'd it Hakeness.
Thither, my SEWOLD, go, or pitch thy tent
Near to thy ships, for they are near the scene.
Nay, to the fleet I'll bear thee company,
And pass the coming night; so will the Saxons
Think we have left their land, then, on the morrow,
With harp in hand, and wallet at my side,
I'll back to Whitby. SEWOLD, fear me not,
Surest success must crown our ripen'd plot. [*Exeunt.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

The Gate of the Castle.

Enter the Falconer and Ralph bearing two Falcons hooded for the field.

FALCONER.

Now a murrain on thee, Ralph! did I not bid thee to fist the blank falcon with the bare breast? He, that on our last day's sport, flew so lusty a flight after the two herons.

Ral. The bird was full-gorg'd, master; and marvel it is, that there was one, unfed up, in the mew; for who would have thought that the king would have been minded to hawk to day?

Fal. Who would have thought! there it is now; as if it became thee, Ralph, to think? No, Ralph, no; thinking, let me tell thee, hardly becomes thy betters. I, now, for example, whose style and title on the Chamberlain's roll stand thus, "His Majesty's first Yeoman Falconer," whereas thou writest thyself, or rather they write for thee, *sub*, that is to say *subaltern*, which means no more than a mere underling. Now mark me, I, as being thy principal, should be principally entitled to think; was thinking, as I before noted, any part of our office.

Ral. Nevertheless thoughts be free, master; and will

come into our brain whether they be in office or not.—Therefore I cannot help thinking that if one royal brother had been coffin'd before the other, that is to say instead of the other, that brother would not have taken his pastime thus timelessly.

Fal. Drinking, thou know'st, Ralph, drives care away, and why may not hawking serve the same good purpose? However this be, his Majesty being minded to hawk, we, look you, must be minded to have our matters in readiness. Therefore cope me that tarsel's talons, and fasten the lease to his jesses more tightly. Mercy on me, what bells be these? Silver, sterling silver tho' they be, they look no better than base pewter; cleanse me them with the lappit of thy leathern doublet, and that instantly. Ha! what younker have we here thus fantastically accoutered?

Ral. Belike it be some scape-goat from the Danish flock, for I saw two or three in the like trim, when the ambassador took his departure.

Enter CURAN. [*Drest as a minstrel.*]

Cur. Give you good day, my masters; 'tis my wish
To rest awhile on this same portal bench,
If so no churlish porter would be angry.

Fal. A smooth-tongued stripling, and withal honestly featur'd; sit where it listeth thee, for thou seemest, my pretty boy, to have outrun thy strength.

Cur. Say rather I've outrun my breath, good falconer;
Give me a moment's pause, and these young legs,

I think, would bear me up a morning's sport
Close at your coursers' heel, nor should your hawks,
What time they darted at their feathered prey,
So fleetly pounce, but I would catch their game
Warm as it fell, or e'er it touch'd the ground.

Fal. Why, when I was of thy age, stripling, and as lithe in the joints, I have often verified thy boast, let me tell thee.

Cur. Doth the king hawk to day?

Fal. He is so minded, my fair youth, we are here waiting his forth-coming.

Cur. Say then, if, to beguile the ling'ring time,
I touch my harp, and chaunt to it a song,
Would it be welcome to thy ear, good falconer?

Fal. Troth would it, my sweet lad; provided the burthen of thy song be not too tedious, and that the measure mar not the sense, as is too often the case with the new-fangled measures now a days.

Cur. Fear it not, falconer, it shall be a song
Of which a Northern prince, some ages gone,
Fram'd both the rhymes and music; thou wilt find
From its sad burthen that he woo'd a princess
Of cruel sort, who mock'd his loving suit.

Fal. There be others besides princesses, youth, who be such like mockers. I have heretofore met one myself in no nobler a shape than that of a miller's daughter. Tho' I was ev'n then in the king's patent service, and as tall of my inches as thou seest me at present. I will therefore

have a fellow feeling for thy prince, having experienced Dorcas's cruelty. Ale, however, helpt me to master my passion, and I prescribe the same remedy to thee, if thou ever should'st come to years of discretion, and should'st chance to be in the same plight: for there be ten excellent qualities in your sound-bodied ale, the first—

Ral. Nay, master, if thou tellest him what these qualities be, in the same sermon-like way thou hast often divided them in my hearing, the king will be here ere we have the lad's ditty; and my ears tingle for it.

Fal. Come on then, my dainty minstrel; we will have thy song first.

CURAN *Sings.*

[*See the song entituled that of Harold the Valiant, in page* 196 *of Vol. I. and of which he is supposed to perform to his Harp one or more stanzas, till interrupted by the entrance of King Edel with Lords attending him to the field. He speaks to one of them entering.*]

EDEL.

Go to, go to,
We will not waste one thought upon the Dane.
He goes displeased. Why, be it so; our state
Sits not so loosely on its well-laid base,
That Denmark, let him put his best strength to it,
Can shake its firmness. Said'st thou not their fleet
Were sail'd? whence then is this young minstrel?
He wears the Danish livery.

Lord. Sir, I know not.

[*Curan throws himself at the king's feet.*

Cur. My gracious Liege, for I will call thee mine,
For, if not mine, where may I find another?
Friendless, forlorn, left on a foreign coast,
By those whose ruthless hearts forbid my tongue
To call them countrymen. O sacred Sir,
Take pity on my wretched state; command
Some of your train to find me an employ,
The lowest not too low for present trial,
Till after proof of duty find me friends
May plead, in my behalf, to your dread ear.
Meanwhile I would not rust in idleness,
That bane of youth, and what too soon might dull
The small, yet practised, faculties I boast.

Ed. Thou talk'st it smoothly, stripling, yet we fear
Thou art some elfish truant, who has dar'd
Thy vassalage throw off, or else, perchance,
For some committed fraud, has fled the stripes
Due to dishonesty.

Cur. Think not thus harshly,
Great Monarch, of your slave. Know, I was born
Of honest parents, virtuously brought up
In fear of God, and man. My aged father
Doth now in Denmark's court, and in the presence,
Strike the chief harp, first of the minstrel band.
Me to Lord SEWOLD's train did he promote,
For that his Excellence did much applaud
My growing skill, and gave him cause to hope
Fair ARGENTILE, Prince CURAN's destin'd spouse,

Would, if she heard me touch the harp before her,
Make me her minstrel. In this hope I left
My lov'd and loving father. On the sea,
Full sorely was I sick, sick ev'n to death;
And, for remembrance of those piercing pangs
I own I loiter'd ('twas my only crime)
The hindmost, when Lord SEWOLD parted hence.
Which known, the Earl, with many a rigid menace,
Bade me "seek here those honours from the Saxons,
That he had fail'd to find." These were his words;
Withal forbidding the remorseful shipmates
To let me mount the vessel. Cruel Dane!
I saw thee hoist thy sails, and call'd for pity;
I saw thy shallop fleetly cut the waves,
And call'd for pity, till my aching eye
Lost sight of the last barque: then on the strand,
Fell I as dead; till youth and nature struggling
Brought back unwelcome life. O gracious King!
Take pity on that helpless minstrel boy,
Who found none from his countrymen.

Ed. In sooth,
My Lords, this Danish boy doth tell his tale
With such a bold and plain simplicity,
As much persuadeth us he speaks us true.
Hast thou, my boy, good skill in minstrelsy?

Cur. So, Sire, to say would be too bold a vaunt;
For higher of that noble art I deem
And its try'd mystery, than yet to boast

I had arriv'd at ev'n the midmost pitch
Of music's high perfection.

Fal. Please you, my Liege, the lad is too modest. If his fingers went by clock-work they could not wrestle with the wires more actively, nor, if a skylark roosted in his throat, could he carol to them more deliciously: he's the very prince of minstrels.

Ed. Peace, knave, and mind thy hawks, and not his harp.

Cur. If it seem good unto my gracious Lord,
I'll run to th' field at his proud courser's side,
And there some moments, ere the game be sprung,
Or at default, make essay of my art
On this slight instrument, striving my best
To sooth his princely ear.

Ed. Come on then, boy,
We there will try thy skill. My Lords, to horse,
And meet us at the bridge, that spans the mote.
Ourselves at the west postern mean to mount.

[*Exeunt severally, Curan following the king.*

SCENE II.

A Garden within the walls of the Castle.

Enter ARGENTILE *and* EDITHA, *with Baskets.*

EDITHA.

Nay, sweetest mistress, share with me the pains,
If it be pains, amid these beds of fragrance
To cull such buds and blooms, as best deserve
To fill our wicker garners. Therefore came we;
'Twas of your own free choice: you said the task
Would help to chase your sorrows. See, my Princess,
How deep a blush, beyond its red compeers,
This rose has caught from the warm kiss of Phœbus!
That, tho' its neighbour, and as far remov'd
From shade and cold, yet glows not half so crimson.
Is it the fault o' th' sun? No; he, kind suitor,
Makes love to both alike. Perchance, my mistress,
That flower, like some coy maids, makes more ado
Ere it will warm to kindness.

Arg. Peace, fond babbler!

Ed. Nay, now I vow, had I so bright a suitor,
That blest me with such gallant visitation,
I'd not do thus, nor turn my pale cheek from him,
But bid him welcome with a buxom blush,

Like this free flower, and thank him for his favours.
Were it not best, what think you?

Arg. Prithee, peace,
I know thou mean'st to chear me by this prattle?
But 'twill not be—come, let us count our thefts:
We've done, methinks, ev'n robbery enough
On these sweet beds.

Ed. See here! besides these roses
Are lilies nam'd o' th' vale, which, to my sense,
Fling from their silver bells a daintier perfume,
Than ev'n the rose itself; spic'd fraxinel,
The golden martagon, the pale narcissus,
And flaunting piony; here's lady's slipper,
And lady's mantle too; curl'd columbines,
And harebells blue and white!

Arg. No, not a month; [*Not regarding her.*
But come another day 'twill be a month,
Since my dear father lean'd him on this arm,
And took some slow-drawn paces down this alley;
But he was tir'd full soon, and sat him down
To rest on this same bench; he panted so,
That then I fear'd him dying.

Ed. Nay, sweet Princess,
Did you not promise me?

Arg. Indeed I did;
Yet then, in very deed, I little hop'd
I long should keep my word.

Ed. Think of his years—

Arg. I know he was full aged, yet some have counted
More years than he ; and some have liv'd to see,
What most they wish'd, their daughters given in marriage,
And blest the sacred union.

Ed. Some, alas !
Have left them sooner, in weak infancy ;
Have left them fatherless, nay, in their cradles ;
Hurried by death ev'n to their wife's fresh grave,
Who died in child-bed : such was my sad case ;
And tho' of gentle, nay, of noble birth,
If nobleness can dwell where riches do not,
Friendless, forlorn, ah ! what had I been now,
Had not the Queen your mother's fost'ring care
Pity'd my orphan state ?

Arg. I fear, my friend,
I am to blame, ev'n unto sin to blame,
Arraigning thus the will of Providence.
Yet he, who gave me tears, will let me shed them,
I trust, without a frown. His gift were vain,
Did I not weep.

Ed. Your royal uncle's care—

Arg. Is he like ADELBRIGHT? will he support
Sad ARGENTILE with half his tenderness ?
Thou canst not think it. Thou thyself hast felt
His sterner temper ; for when OSWALD's son,
The gallant EDWIN sued for thee in marriage,

Who but my uncle mar'd your mutual bliss,
And made his father act a tyrant's part?
Alas, thou weep'st! I was to blame in op'ning
A wound, that time had clos'd.

Ed. And if I weep,
'Tis only that his hapless love for me
Caus'd the brave youth to fly his native realm,
A voluntary exile. To his suit
Thou know'st, my Princess, I demean'd myself
Ever with virgin coyness, as I ought.

Arg. Thou didst, and therein claim'st thy sexes praise.

Ed. Gallant as EDWIN was, my tongue was able
To interdict his passion; therefore, sure,
I lov'd him not, spite of the rising sighs
That ever meet his mention. Had I lov'd him,
I must have yielded; he was all so worthy
To raise a mutual flame—where then my praise?
But, hush, his father comes! his earnest look
Tells me he means to claim a private audience.
He ill would brook my presence.

Arg. Thou, poor EDITHA,
Wilt ev'n as ill brook his! retire thee, then;
Yet stray not out of call. [*Exit Editha.*

Enter OSWALD.

Osw. Your pardon, Princess,
That, quitting forms, I thus abruptly venture—

Arg. Ah, my good Lord, away with idle forms!

You were my Father's friend, and that secures
A constant welcome to his orphan child.
But why so much disturb'd?

Osw. Is there not cause?
Has not King EDEL done—

Arg. What, my good Lord?
Till this same hour I never left my chamber.
What has my uncle done?

Osw. Flouted the Dane,
And sent his Envoy back with blank refusal.

Arg. 'Tis as I thought, not fear'd: yet herein read
A sum of num'rous future wrongs prepar'd
To fall full soon upon my innocent head.

Osw. Not one, not one, no not the slightest wrong,
While OSWALD wields a sword to check its fall.
Have comfort, Princess; you have round your person
A set of Peers, whose perfect loyalty
Will at my call pour out their best heart's blood
In your defence.

Arg. O Heav'n forefend, my Lord,
That ARGENTILE should be the cause of bloodshed!
Sooner than so, I would resign my throne,
And take a subject's station. Trust me, Earl,
I ne'er was fond of this same pageant state,
And smilingly could quit it.

Osw. Say not so.
Born to a crown, that crown must grace your head:
And we have powers to give it legal firmness.

Arg. No, rather let him drive me from his realm
A hapless exile. I am not the first
His arts have forc'd away.

Osw. I read your meaning.
It was indeed his arts, curst EDEL's arts,
That struck the flint on my too fervent nature,
And bade it fire. Stop, ye repentant sighs,
You will not call my darling EDWIN back!
Alas! you cannot: to th' extremest verge
Of this wide isle my fruitless search has reach'd:
No, I must ne'er again behold my boy;
He's lost, I fear, for ever.

Arg. Hope the best;
And promise me, if e'er the youth returns,
He'll have thy full forgiveness.

Osw. So from Heav'n
May I have precious hope of after pardon,
As now my son has mine!

Arg. Enough, enough.
Thou shew'st thyself again a tender father;
Therefore I take thee for my loyal friend,
Nay rather for my father. Yes, good Earl,
Thou know'st I want one; thou too want'st a child:
Act then a father's part, and guard my weakness
'Gainst my fear'd uncle's arts. Yet, if he goes
No further than to break my present marriage,
He has my ready pardon: She, who loses
A boon she never yet had learn'd to prize,

Is scarce a loser. Does he wish me still
To live in virgin state? My wishes there
Bear him free company; yet much I fear
Some greater cruelty.

Osw. To thwart these nuptials
Is more than cruelty; 'tis sacrilege
To ADELBRIGHT's just memory———

Arg. Of this,
My Lord, your prudence must more fitly judge
Than a young maiden's. Therefore, Sir, to you,
And to such peers as were my father's friends,
I trust my honest cause, and will in all
Accord to your sage councils. Honour'd Earl,
Adieu. Come forward, faithful EDITHA,
And lead me to my chamber.

[*Exeunt Argentile and Editha.*

Osw. Remorseless tyrant!
To wrong this pattern of all virgin virtues;
While I have life I will oppose thy malice!

[*Exit Oswald.*

SCENE III.

Changes to the Gate of the Castle.

Enter King Edel and Lords as returned from Hawking. Curan, Falconer, and Ralph attending.

EDEL.

Beshrew me, Lords, but this same Danish boy
Did give us sweet addition to our sport.
I know not whether most to praise the fleet
Activity, by which, our game in view,
He cours'd the field, and left our fleetest steeds
Lagging behind; or whether, at default,
Perch'd on some land-mark stone, he struck his harp
And caroll'd his soft ditty. By St. HILDA
He is a peerless boy.

Ld. True, my dread Liege:
And then his dauntless spirit, mixt so meekly
With boyish shamefac'dness! for when your Highness
Did praise his skill, it brought a crimson blush
Fresh to his cheek, that seem'd to call in question
Whether such praise were just, proving by the doubt
His rightful claim to it.

Ed. True, we noted it;
A merit seldom mark'd in such as ply
The minstrel craft. Come forward, pretty youth,

Take thou these angels. Thou hast pleas'd us well.
My Lord our Chamberlain, have it in charge
This boy be well appointed, in such sort
As fits our cup-bearer. Thus we advance him
Ev'n at the first, and his shall be the blame
If he not gains swift marks of future favour.

Cur. Low at your feet I fall, my gracious Sov'reign,
And promise true allegiance.

Ed. Rise, and thank us
By thy fair service. We do hold to-morrow
A high carousal. See that thou attend us
In thy fit weeds, when in our hall we dine,
We and our peers. [*Exeunt Edel and Lords.*

Manent CURAN, FALCONER, *and* RALPH.

Cur. Why, this is as it should be—
Our good star smiles on us beyond our hopes.
How now, good Master Falconer, why this distance?
What! cap in hand too; prithee, friend, be cover'd.

Fal. I know better, good Master Cup-bearer, I know better. When, indeed, the every day sun in yonder sky shines upon me, I veil myself without ceremony, expecting no more from him than a scorch'd forehead; but, when the sun of court favour shines upon me, though as now, only as it were by reflexion, I doff my cap most reverently, as thereby hoping for somewhat that may warm my old heart. As for you, my young Sir, who are become to-day the minion of dame Fortune, I know not how thou wilt demean thyself to-morrow; therefore

before to-morrow comes, I will venture to call myself thy old friend; inasmuch I was thy friend before the King was, and am withal three years older than his Majesty.

Cur. I own thee for my friend, and hold thy kindness In fair memorial.

Fal. I thank thee. Yet as the good luck, which has of late befallen thee, may in time help to weaken thy memory, suffer me to put thee now in mind that, in the morning when thou camest hither out of breath, desirous of sitting on yonder bench to rest thee awhile, I call'd thee pretty youth, and bade thee sit down boldly; thereby, as I may say, installing thee for a courtier.

Cur. Thou didst, and for that courteous installation This angel be thy fee. [*Gives him the money.*

Fal. Blessings on thy young heart! had I thought thou would'st have paid me thus generously, I would have pull'd off my doublet and made thee a cushion of it; thou should'st never have been installed on the hard stone. But I would wish thee also to recollect, that the very moment thou mad'st offer to give me a touch of thy minstrelsy, I took thee at thy word. Whereby——

Ral. Nay, in troth, Master, that thou didst not, but was minded to interrupt the lad's ditty (I crave your honour's pardon, for you was but a lad then), yet your honour well knows he would have told you a long preamble about the ten virtues in strong ale, which I, who have heard the old homily a hundred times, and know it to be as long as one of Father Anselm's, and withal as

unedifying, save when one has the brown pitcher before one, persuaded him to cease the delivery of. This had I not done in the very nick of time—

Cur. Thou didst; and for that friendly office, see, How this twin angel greets thee.

[*Gives Ralph an angel.*

Ral. Aye, that indeed does it, and most angelically poor Ralph is your liege vassal for ever.

Fal. Though the knave has, as I may say, robb'd me of my second merit, neither he nor any man in Dëira shall of my third; which resteth in this, that I prais'd thy minstrelsy to the King: and what, though he flouted me for it? I have known him many a time and oft do so in the field, and yet nevertheless abide by my council: Therefore assure thyself, that what I said concerning the lark's roosting in thy throat did thee no thriftless piece of service.

Cur. Whether it did or not, 'twas said in kindness, And is as such rewarded. [*Gives him another angel.*

Fal. St. Hilda bless thee! There remaineth now but a fourth merit to remind thee of, which, to say truth, respecteth myself singly. It is this; that I, being, as thou seest, an old and true-bred courtier, am wholly void of one vice, which hath been imputed to our sect for time immemorial.

Cur. I pray thee name it.

Fal. That can I, Master, and with a safe conscience. —The vice is envy, which, thou knowest, is one of the

seven deadly sins. Now whereas thou art suddenly made King's cup-bearer, and thereby put over the head of myself and many a better man, yet do I not envy thee thine honour; but think verily thou wilt acquit thyself in that high office better, than ev'n I should myself at these years.

Cur. Indeed, and may I credit thee!

Ral. Nay, Master, here put I in for a share in the merit. I am younger, and, I trust, more handy than the Falconer himself, and yet, where the matter of cup-bearing is concerned, I knock under to your honour's courtly bearing and gentility. I do in faith.

Cur. Enough; then share this last bright coin between ye,
And see you drink to my prosperity.
Good friends, farewell. [*Exit Curan.*

Ral. Aye, my Master, that will we do: we'll see the cann to the bottom, were it as big as Ulphus's horn.

Fal. Ralph, mark me well, Ralph, this young spend-thrift will be wiser in time. But till that time comes, it behoves us to drink to the long continuance of so generous a folly. [*Exeunt Ralph and Falconer.*

SCENE IV.

The King's Closet.—EDEL, *solus.*

Ev'n when we first set eye upon this youth
We thought his face trick'd out by our good stars
To fit our long-meant purpose. He shall wed
Our niece; shall pass on her for Denmark's prince.
His youth, his comeliness, his country too,
Will stamp him very CURAN in her heart;
And, married to an alien and a peasant,
Where then will be her royalty? But first
I must dismiss Earl OSWALD. He is honest,
And has, what oft is found with honesty,
A hot and credulous spirit, which we found
Easy to practise on to his son's ruin,
Who had that stubborn and rebellious bearing,
We fear'd might after harm us. But in this,
Were we to make the old earl privy to it,
He ne'er would meet our wishes: he shall go
Envoy to Denmark; but my arts will fail me,
If e'er he living lands on Denmark's shore.
What ho! who waits there? is Lord OSWALD come?

Enter OSWALD *with an* USHER.

Ush. My Liege, the Earl attends. [*Exit Usher.*

Ed. Welcome, good OSWALD!
We have a weighty business to impose

On thy allegiance, and, as we do hold
Thy prudence far beyond the vulgar scope,
Resolve in this high point to trust it solely.

Osw. My Liege, ye do out-rate it.

Ed. Not a whit.
Believe us, honest OSWALD, we have pois'd
Thy merits well, and found them in our balance
Of sterling proof—but to the present business.
Thou know'st already we of late thought fit
To check this alien marriage of our neice,
And thwart the hasty Dane.

Osw. I do indeed,
And marvel at it much; nay, to speak plain,
(OSWALD must speak so, tho' his King's the hearer)
It wounds your brother's memory.

Ed. Hear our reasons.
We hold it all unsafe, for the realm's weal,
A stranger should come in to lord it here
In right of our young niece; and therefore, Earl,
(Tho' inly did our bowels yearn to break
Our word with our dead brother) yet the good
Of two great kingdoms far o'ercame that scruple.

Osw. But when the offended majesty of Denmark
Shall arm a fleet—

Ed. Why, this may be expected;
And though we trust we have sufficient powers
To cope with his best strength, yet would we rather
Prevent all bloodshed; and with this fair aim

We mean to send thee, in all haste, to Denmark,
Our peaceful envoy.

Osw. Might I bear the Princess
To her expecting spouse, I should with joy
Accept the high commission: such a freight
Will only load my ship with the just price
To buy us peace from Denmark.

Ed. Tush, old Earl,
The Dane will dread to fight us: let him dare it.
After such truce thy audience there may win,
We shall be well-prepar'd to meet his wrath,
And foil it too.

Osw. You said you wish'd for peace.

Ed. I do; if peace and amity, Lord OSWALD,
May be procur'd at a much cheaper rate,
Than one of our two kingdoms.

Osw. Our two kingdoms!
Then, ARGENTILE, thy half is lost already. [*Aside.*

Ed. Why muse ye thus, my Lord, we did expect
More free acceptance of that honour'd charge,
Which we so freely offer'd.

Osw. Age, my Liege,
Makes me unfit—

Ed. Say rather that thy age
Makes thee most fit; for reverence hangs on age,
And suits our envoy. Lords of greener years
Would sue for the great charge, but on thyself
Our choice has fixt; if thou disclaim'st the task,

Thou art not what I deem'd thee. For the moment
I leave thee to resolve what likes thee best,
Whether to meet thy Sov'reign's will with duty,
Or force him think, what he would wish unthought,
Thou'rt the Dane's friend not his: within an hour
Give me thy final and assenting answer. [*Exit Edel.*

Osw. It is too plain; he does but wish my absence,
To pass some cruel fraud on ARGENTILE;
And give himself, by that fair maid's mishap,
More right, or seeming right, in his two kingdoms.
Two kingdoms, tyrant!—One is more than due,
But patience—I must act awhile the part
My soul disdains, must seem to accept his charge—
Yes, I will be his envoy to the Dane;
But only to convey that treasure with me
Is the Dane's plighted due. Now to the Princess,
To win her to my purpose: she must hence,
And quickly; for, if here she dares to wait,
Death, or still worse than death, must be her fate.
[*Exit Oswald.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

A Royal Apartment.

Enter King EDEL *and* CURAN.

Ed. Dost thou not boast?

Cur. In truth I do not, Sir;
Ev'n in our days of greenest infancy
I was his humble play-mate; and, when youth
Nerv'd him for stouter sports, the gallant Prince
Would make me his compeer; to shoot the shaft,
To pitch the bar, to wrestle, race, or tilt,
In these and all like proofs of hardiment,
He ever chose my rivalry.

Ed. If so,
Haply, thou now couldst counterfeit his person.

Cur. I could, my Liege, were there a fit occasion.

Ed. Were we right sure of this, occasion now
Should call thee to the trial.

Cur. Some have thought
My lineaments did much resemble CURAN'S.
Nay, once I do remember, in our childhood,
We did in sport change dress; and I the while,
My little heart beating with innocent pride,
So strutted in his plumes, as caus'd a smile

On many a cheek to see with what mock grace
I aped the heir of Denmark.

Ed. So even now
Thou seem'st to act him o'er again; in sooth
Thou art a peerless boy, and wilt befit
Our business to our wish; which, to tell briefly,
Is this, that thou, in semblance of the prince,
Should'st play the suitor to our royal niece;
For which thy youth, and, wherefore should we rob thee
Of what was Heav'n's own gift, thy comliness
Will stand thee in good stead. Beauty and youth
Are the best weapons in a gallant's hand
To conquer virgin coyness, these thou hast
From nature, these king EDEL bids thee use,
Which, if thou dost like one of Cupid's teaching,
Beshrew me, boy, but it will raise thy fortunes
Higher than now thou dream'st of.

Cur. My dread Liege,
Ye surely mean to mock your humble vassal;
I pray ye scoff not at my poverty.

Ed. Trust us, fair youth, we do not. By our faith,
A sov'reign's faith, win thou our ARGENTILE
And thou shalt wear her. But she must be won,
Her heart, her soul must be thine own so fixt,
That if we frown and cross awhile your nuptials,
Which for state reasons we perchance may feign,
Thou may'st persuade her to be thine by flight:
This if thou canst atchieve—

Cur. I know not, Sir,
But this so sudden, so unhoped an honour
O'erpowers me wholly; can you mean, my Liege,
In very truth?

Ed. By all the saints we do.

Cur. Then be it so; that gracious smile did seem
To dart a ruddy beam of royalty
Warm to my heart. I am not what I was;
I tread with loftier step; my heart beats high,
As if the blood of Denmark boil'd within it.

Ed. Excellent boy! his ev'ry word and gesture
Insures success, and tops our highest hope.
In faith, Prince CURAN, for thou well dost suit
The gallant title, thou dost please us highly.
Some three hours hence take heed that thou attend
Our summons to our closet: thou shalt there
Have further schooling; meanwhile, on thy life,
Be secret.

Cur. Take that life, if I am false.

Ed. We will not doubt thee; favour'd as thou art,
Thou must be true to us, who show such favour,
And mean so to augment it.

Cur. At thy feet
I swear—

Ed. Arise, thou hast our confidence,
And soon shalt from our wardrobe have dispens'd
Those vestments, which befit thy state to wear
In audience of our niece.

Cur. Impatiently,
My Liege, shall I expect them; for these weeds
Seem now to sit untowardly upon me:
I burn to change them.

Ed. Wait us in our closet. [*Exit King.*

Cur. (*solus*) Can it be thus? indeed, indeed men wrong thee,
My mistress Fortune, when they paint thee blind!
Shew me an eagle, that, with firmest eye
Can meet the sun in his meridian march,
And I will call that eye, compar'd with thine,
The bat's that blinks at twilight: were 't not so,
Thou could'st not guide thy hardly-govern'd wheel
So evenly foreright, as now thou dost;
And swift too, as 't would fire its very axle.
O that my SEWOLD knew!—But truce awhile
With exultation. Pass three little hours
And I have audience of fair ARGENTILE.
How then to act? why, as a spirit would,
Who has the magic power to shift, and turn
From visible t' invisible, as best
May suit his present purpose. Let me see her,
And in her face, I con the ready part
I have to play; the full game thus before me,
I'll win it, or I'll lose it, as I list.

Enter FALCONER.

Fal. Where is the King's Majesty? lead me instantly to the King's Majesty's own personal presence! Mercy

on me, I have hardly breath left me to deliver that news to him which, I trust, will choak him with choler. Brave master Cup-bearer, present me unto him this moment. —There is no time to be lost, I can assure you; by this they must be at least six miles deep, look you, in the forest.

Cur. They! say, who mean you?

Fal. Yes, in good troth, that is a likely story; and from a man of my years and experience, who has been about court, man and boy, for full fifty years come next all-hallow tide; to expect now by one single, and, with your leave, simple question, to get such a secret out of such a man! But you are a green courtier, master Cup-bearer, and are therefore to be excused. Come, lead me to the King's Majesty; it will suffice, I trust, if I unbosom unto his Grace those I mean by my *they*, that are now in the forest.

Cur. Thou art indeed an old and full-bred courtier Thus to forget——

Fal. What! that you gave me certain angels of late to drink to your God-speed? The service for which those angels were given was conscientiously performed. Why then should the memory of the gift remain, when the cause of it is cancell'd. Nevertheless I do remember those angels so well, and the number of them, as to know that, were they increas'd in tenfold proportion, they would not purchase an answer to thy present question, though compriz'd in a tiney single syllable. Enough for thee to

know, that the secret is for royal ears, to which I command thee to lead me.

Cur. I will lead no man to the royal presence,
Who brings unpleasant tidings.

Fal. Thou art a shrewd stripling, that must be said for thee, having already guest so much of my secret, as to know it is no very pleasant one.

Cur. Who then, but thee, would bear it to the King?
Was it a secret he would joy to hear,
Thy fee might chance be ample; as it is,
Trust me, he'll only pay thee with a frown,
Fitting the sort and colour of that secret.

Fal. Why indeed I do believe it will make his Majesty swear a little.

Cur. Surely it will—to go without his leave
By stealth, and thro' the forest. Then their rank,
Men he so much had honour'd.—

Fal. Nay, there you are out; there is but one man in the party.

Cur. The princess surely has not fled the court.

Fal. Since thou dealest with the devil, I find it will be most prudent in me to make thee a party concern'd. —Know then most assuredly, that the princess has fled the court, accompanied only with old Lord Oswald.

Cur. Death to my hopes—but art thou sure of this?

Fal. If seeing is believing, that am I; but to tell thee the matter in form and circumstance. I was practising a tarsel at the lure, in a deep sort of a dell, some two miles

distant from the castle; where I heard a rustling of leaves in a sidelong road to the left; there, thro' the thicket, I saw the princess brush briskly on that white palfry, on which she has hawked these two last seasons; before her gallop'd Lord Oswald on his stout bay gelding, who is half brother to King Edel's Swift; that very same steed he rode on yesterday, when thou sang'st thyself into thy preferment. They made as much haste, I can assure thee, as a vile, stony, uphill, bridle-style road would suffer them. But this is not all; for, hast'ning home with my news, I met with another strong cause of suspicion that they are bent on no honest errand; for, crossing the road that leads to the west gate, I saw a smock-fac'd kind of youth, more smock-fac'd even than thyself, bless the mark, in a green doublet and hose, trudging away as fast as a pair of very spindle-shanked legs could carry him; 'twas a face I had seen before, but could not rightly tell where; nor did I recollect it till I had enter'd the castle-gate. But now I'll take my Bible oath 'twas no boy but a girl, and that girl my Lady Editha, the princess's fav'rite waiting-gentlewoman.

Cur. Did she pursue her mistress?

Fal. No, no, she took quite a different road, yet a footpath, that meets the other some eight miles distance: she went down the valley, whereas the princess and Lord Oswald took up the hill.

Cur. And would'st thou bear such tidings to the King?

Fal. Marry that would I, and must too, for they be true ones.

Cur. Go then and meet his wrath, who didst neglect
To seize the handmaid. Go and meet his wrath
For this thy tardiness. Know'st not that the time
Thou here hast spent with me, is worse than lost:
This when he knows, he'll on thy back inflict
A stripe for every moment.

Fal. Mercy on me! why would'st thou detain me? lead me to him directly.

Cur. Falconer, I am thy friend. I'll point a way
Much safer than to EDEL. Hence with me
This instant in pursuit of the lost princess.

Fal. What! before we acquaint the King's Majesty of her elopement, and have his royal writ to arrest her highness?

Cur. I grant thee, wert thou sure of such commission,
It might be well to seek it: but her flight
Once known, he will dismiss some earl or knight,
Or valorous captain, on such high pursuit,
Not thee, poor peasant; what then shall become
Of thy reward? now thou and I together
Are a full match for OSWALD. Him subdued,
And ARGENTILE recover'd, double knighthood
Will surely be our fee.

Fal. Earl OSWALD, let me tell you, tho' old, is stout and well timber'd, and may not be so easily master'd as your vanity may imagine.

Cur. But we will raise the country to assist us,
When once we find them.

Ful. Yes indeed, that bears some likelihood. The *posse comitatus*, and we at the head of them! he cannot make them all knights, and as we shall appear to be the first movers in the business, you know; and the King's patent servants before that—

Cur. True, true, but time is precious. Haste we hence.
Lead me the way they went, and trust me, Falconer,
Soon as we find them, our reward is sure.

SCENE II.

An outer Court in the Castle.

Enter two LORDS.

F. Lord. In these Earl OSWALD's letters, briefly penn'd
The hour they took their flight, you read the sum
Of this black business; nor have now to ask
For proof more formal or of the King's baseness,
Or the Earl's honesty; ere this, I trust,
He has lodg'd the princess in some place of safety.

S. Lord. I praise his prudence: ev'n in that loud note
I'd thunder out destruction to the tyrant,
Could words destroy him; but that calls for deeds.

F. Lord. And deeds shall be attempted. Mark me, Sir,
Already I've bestirr'd me to this end
With hope of fair success; prompted by me,

Your cousin ALDRED, captain of the guards,
Ev'n now is sowing thro' the soldiery
The seeds of hot commotion. You, my Lord,
Can boast much interest with our honest burghers,
Which might be us'd.

S. Lord. And shall to th' full extent
Of my best faculties, for which in pledge
I lock this hand of fellowship in thine,
And swear to risk my fortune, honour, life,
In ARGENTILE's just cause. Nor doubt I, Lord,
Before to-morrow's dawn, to head in arms
Three thousand citizens. But see the tyrant!
Let's hide our honest hate in loyal seemings,
Till execution ripens.

Enter King EDEL *hastily,*
A Courtier and Ralph following.

EDEL.

Brings the slave
No plainer tidings?

Court. None, my gracious Liege.

Ed. Fellow, be brief, and tell us all thou saw'st.

Ral. Please your Majesty, your Majesty's yeoman falconer and I, who by your Majesty's favour am his deputy, were some hours agone practising a young hawk at the lure in a place on the side of the forest called Deadman's Dell; where we saw the Princess and Earl OSWALD ride hastily thro' the thick coppice on the left, just as the gentleman has inform'd your Highness. My

master, on seeing them, left me with the bird, and said he would hie him to the castle, and give your Majesty information thereof.

Ed. And why in this did the vile traitor fail?

Ral. Of that, please your Highness, I am innocent. All I know is, that when I had given my bird its exercise, and was returning to our lodge in the great park, I spied my master at some distance, and the young stripling with him, now your Majesty's cup-bearer.

Ed. Ha! said'st thou he, the Danish minstrel!

Ral. The same; but in an English forester's garb. Whereupon I was at first minded to go and ask master whether he had waited on your Highness. But when I considered that he was in company with a gentleman of such high office, it behoved me, as I thought, to keep my distance, being assured I should only gain one of my master's heaviest oaths, if not blows, in answer to my question. However, still suspecting that your Majesty might not be privy to the matter, I came forthwith to consult this gentleman, who, under your Majesty's favour, heretofore procured me my place.

Ed. Enough, enough; come forward, good my Lords
And trusty counsellors. You see your king
Struck to the very soul at the strange flight
Of our fond niece. Young as the wanton was,
We did not think she would so far debase
Her royal lineage, as (we blush to own it)
This act declares she has.

F. Lord. But, gracious Sov'reign,
We marvel most Earl Oswald led her forth.

Ed. True; but we live in such a world, my Lords,
That, whoso marvels at like wickedness,
May pass thro' life, feeling no other passion
Than blank astonishment. Full well we guess
The trait'rous purpose why the Earl contriv'd
Our niece's flight; nay, we can count the sums
That Denmark long has paid into his coffers.
More at our council board will we unfold,
Whereat this evening, with our other Lords,
We bid ye to attend us.

F. Lord. Sire, in all
Command our ready duty.

Ed. We there mean
To take your voices, who may best supply
The throne our truant niece has vacated.
But first we'll bend us at St. Hilda's shrine,
And ask, most needful in a strait like this,
Heav'n's holy aid to guide us in our councils.

[*Exeunt Edel, &c.*

SCENE III.

Changes to the Vale of Hakeness; a Hermit's Cell in front near a Rivulet.

Sewold comes out of the Cell, follow'd by Edwin disguis'd as a Hermit, but without his beard.

SEWOLD.

Thanks to thy courtesy, thou reverend Seer;
For youth like thine is reverend. Solitude
And silence, inmates of this peaceful vale,
Have given thee, what a length of busy years,
Spent in the noise and turmoil of the world,
Oft fail to give, rich store of useful truths,
Well rang'd on memory's tablet. Yet I marvel,
Young Lord, what led thee in thy life's fair prime
To this so close seclusion; thou hast said,
It was not for that end, which ignorance
Misdeems religion, and I trust it was not
For that still falser end, which rankling spleen
Miscalls philosophy.

Ed. Indeed it was not.
Yet there are ills, begot of sad mischance,
Which sacred solitude alone can cure;
And some there are, of such a stubborn sort,
As mock her powers medicinal; yet still

Where'er she fails to cure, she serves to sooth,
For this I use her opiate; ever far
From perfect remedy, yet much reliev'd
By her emollient aid.

Sew. There is, young Lord,—
Another leach, whose drugs have passing power
O'er every malady that mars the mind.
That leach is Friendship; he would probe thy wound
With tenderest hand, and, while he opens, heal.
O that my son were here! for I, alas,
Am all unequal, from discordant years,
To the sweet task! his youthful converse gay,
Mixt with soft sympathy and smiling tears,
Would lure thee to unbosom in his breast
Thy every care, and, opening thus a course
To thy pent sorrows, bid them run to waste,
Or change them into pleasures.

Ed. Think not, Dane,
That solitude has blunted in this breast
The inborn taste for choice society,
Or that still richer relish for blest friendship,
Which Nature gives her votaries. Think not, Dane,
Quitting the world, I meant to quit that love
Instinctive, that each creature owes its kind,
And, chief of these, that man still owes to man.

Sew. I trust indeed thou didst not.—But methinks
I hear some footstep. 'Tis perchance my son—
Ah no—my vassal Baldwin from the fleet.

Enter a DANISH SAILOR.

Sail. My Lord, a fly-boat from yon neighb'ring port,
Its freight one seaman only, hail'd our ships;
And, when we bade him quietly approach,
Row'd sidelong to the first, and on its deck
This packet flung, and hied him back with speed.

[*Sewold takes the letter, opens it, and reads.*

" *To the Lord Ambassador of Denmark,*
Greeting.

" The unkingly manner, in which your high Embas-
" sage has been treated, by him who was bound by oath
" given to the dying King ADELBRIGHT to treat it with
" all due honour, has awaken'd much displeasure in the
" breast of many honest Saxons, who are at once friends
" to their own country and well affected to the majesty
" of Denmark. Amongst these no man is more strongly
" offended than the writer of this letter, who hereby pro-
" mises, if so that your Excellency shall think meet to
" anchor two days longer in your present station, to
" convey safely to your fleet (if Heav'n favours his just
" design) the fair object of your embassage. Hoping that
" ere this shall reach your hands, he shall have already
" secur'd her from the wiles of the tyrant.

" Signed, OSWALD."

Ed. OSWALD! [*Starting.*

Sew. That start bespeaks you know him.

Ed. Know him!

Sew. Methinks I see the tears gush from your eye.
Say, Sir, I pray ye, is he of such rank
And influence in the court, that I may trust
On what he here doth promise?

Ed. Noble Dane,
He is the very soul of honesty.
In virtue as superior as in birth,
And from that birth as high an earldom holds
As Anglia gives; his virtues are his own.
Your pardon, Sir, I cannot count the sum
Of his just praises.—Peace, my fluttering heart,
He is—but rather let me say, he was—
And yet, perchance, now he is EDEL's foe,
He may be still my father.

Sew. Say'st thou, Youth,
Thy father? then we need no more credentials.
And yet, it seems, from the disjointed phrase
That gave this to my knowledge, some harsh treatment,
Which sure to such a son—May I not press
Thy further confidence?

Ed. To such sage ears
To tell a tale of disappointed love
Must make the teller blush: suffice to say,
That for this cause I lodg'd me in this cell;
Because, by cruel EDEL's arts misled,
He frown'd on my chaste wishes; since the day
I hid me here twice has yon golden orb
Finish'd his annual round, and here did mean

To end that life in pining solitude,
I was forbid t' enjoy in virtuous love.
Yet trust me, Dane, if, as those letters speak,
The genius stern of liberty is rous'd,
And threats the tyrant's fall, this hermitage
No more shall shroud me. Trust me, noble stranger,
I'll instant list beneath fair Freedom's banners,
Eager to plant my dagger in the breast
Of her fell foe. Then farewell these hoar vestments,
And welcome helm and hawberk.

Sew. Gallant Youth,
This zeal sits well upon thy manly front,
And soon, I deem, thy father and thy country
Will call it into action. For the moment,
I hasten to the fleet to spread new orders
Touching its further stay. My son, I hope,
Will soon be here; for this thy cell was fixt
Our place of meeting. If, ere my return,
The youth arrives, thy courtesy, I trust,
Will bid him kindly welcome.

Ed. As a brother. [*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE IV.

Changes to another part of the Valley.

Enter EDITHA *disguised in a Forester's Habit.*

EDITHA.

Thus far, tho' long and dreary was the way,
Have I adventur'd safely; and am now
Secure from all pursuit. Yet, like the hare
That pants, and trembles, and with prick'd-up ears
Still thinks the hound is nigh, her speed had foil'd;
So do I start, and stop, and fear a foe
In every rustling breeze. The housewife, she
That with her oaten cakes and curdled cream
At yonder homely cabin late refresh'd me,
Has made me much her debtor. Heaven so smile
On this day's business, as its justice merits;
Then to the princess shall my grateful tongue
Make fair memorial of that gentle hostess.

The FALCONER *appears on the Brow of a high Hill to the Left.*

Fal. What ho! young Dane, what ho! I have done my errand, the fleet lie to the south-east trimly array'd and safely anchored. What ho! do'st not hear me?

Ed. Ye Saints defend me! sure I heard a voice. This is no place of safety. [*Exit hastily.*

Fal. What ho! why flyest thou? Have I not done as

thou badest me? [*Descending the hill.*] Murrain take him! if this young scape-gallows has not left me. What ho! Master Cup-bearer! I might as well whistle to the winds as try to recall him. O that a man of my age and sober sense should ever turn out such a fool! first, he makes me climb up a hill, as steep as a very ladder, to look out for the Danish fleet, as if the young knave (who within the year, I trust, has been many a time whipt for climbing his neighbours pear-trees) was not far fitter for such an errand. Up, however, climbs I, at the manifest risk of bursting my old lungs; does the business; spies the fleet; advertises him of it, and what get I for my trouble, but the sight of a pair of light heels, and the comfort of being left alone in a perilous wood? My only consolation is, that, being a stranger to the country, he may peradventure return here for my guidance; therefore in that expectation will I sit down and rest myself a little. Hist, hist, what rustling was that in the glen to the left! Mercy on me! Lord OSWALD himself, the very man it was our business to seize. And now in the very nick of time this young traitor has left me. To attack him by myself were very madness, and yet, had I but the courage to do it, I were a made man all my life after. Now, if he were not armed——

Enter OSWALD *hastily, and seizes the Falconer by the throat.*

Osw. What errand brought thee here? speak, caitiff, speak.

Fal. O for mercy! what? speak when I am throtled! For the love of St. Hilda slacken thy gripe.

Osw. Quit then thy staff and all thy other arms, That dagger in thy belt. Lie there, thou ruffian.

[*Throws him down and lifts his sword over him.*

Nay, if thou stirr'st this point is in thy heart.

Fal. Spare my life, noble Earl, spare but my life, and I'll discover the whole truth. I was decoy'd here, it is true, on the felonious intent of finding where you had bestowed the Princess ARGENTILE.

Osw. And dost thou own it, dastard!

Fal. Alas! what would lying about the matter do for me? Nay, more, I was spirited up to endeavour to make seizure of your honour's person. Not that I ever meant to attempt it single-handed. The young rogue that was sworn to assist me, has left me here, like a vagabond and coward as he is. And now, having told the whole truth, let me beg on my knees— [*Offering to rise.*

Osw. Nay, if thou stirr'st!

Fal. That frown, gracious Sir, is enough for me. O for mercy withdraw that lifted blade! only till I say one short prayer to St. Hilda, that she may intercede with your honour to spare my life.

[*Oswald takes the belt that hung over the Falconer's shoulder, and with that and the quarter-staff pinions his arms.*

Osw. Now, traitor, thou art safe; I will not kill thee.

Fal. No, noble OSWALD, if thou didst, the more

would be the pity for me, and the less the profit for thyself; for thereby wouldst thou lose the knowledge of what once told, would be worth the purchase of my pardon, nay, of my freedom.

Osw. Go to: Declare that knowledge.

Fal. Would you, Sir, be pleased to climb yonder hill with me, I would show your honour a sight would do you good to see; for I am shrewdly out of my politics, if he, that has run away from one king, would not be very fain to put himself under the protection of another.

Osw. What mean'st thou, knave?

Fal. Nothing, please your worship, but this: That whereas in your present condition, craving your pardon, you are liable to be taken up for a —— (I will not name the word, it is so hardly favoured) you might by my honest assistance find safer refuge for yourself, than these old oaks and underling briars will be long able to afford you. Now the Danish fleet being at present within hailing—

Osw. Sayst thou the Danish fleet? and not yet sail'd!

Fal. I say it, Sir, and swear it to boot; for I saw it just now with these eyes, lying snug at anchor in a bay under the other side of that cliff.

Osw. Ha! this is news indeed; my royal charge
Is then secure. I'll haste to lead her thither.

[*Exit hastily.*

Fal. Nay, for mercy's sake, for the sake of all honour and justice, take off these gyves first, and let me follow!

Heugh! a lad of sixteen would not have gone off much more nimbly. He is as quick at the work, as my late honest friend and companion the Cup-bearer. Honesty, there is no such thing now-a-days in the world! Youth and age, sixteen and sixty, makes no difference as to that matter. I am right serv'd for not bargaining better for my liberty, before I told my secret; and nothing, but the manifest fear of death before my eyes, absolves me from the title and stile of mere driveller. All I have now to do is to waddle up and down the forest, like a yoked gander, till some pitiful forester (if there be pity in the kind) sets me at liberty; in the hope of which I now begin my pilgrimage. [*Exit Falconer.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

Another Part of the Valley.

Enter ARGENTILE *in the dress of a Shepherdess.*

ARGENTILE.

Welcome, these russet weeds, this pastoral crook,
More welcome than the sceptre and the train!
These are the simple 'tire that Nature meant
Her votaries should wear; sweet smiling Health,
And Happiness, and Peace, her holy sisters,
Never wore other, when, in better days,
They deign'd to dwell with mortals. Hail, thrice hail,
Thou solitary scene! how far beyond
The pageantry of courts thy stillness charms!
This grove my sighs shall consecrate; in shape
Of some fair tomb, here will I heap the turf,
And call it ADELBRIGHT's. Yon aged yew,
Whose rifted trunk, rough bark, and knarled roots
Give solemn proof of its high antientry,
Shall canopy the shrine. There's not a flower,
That hangs the dewy head and seems to weep,
As pallid blue bells, crow-toes, and marsh lilies,
But I'll plant here; and, if they chance to wither,

My tears shall water them: there's not a bird
That trails a sad soft note, as ringdoves do,
Or twitters painfully like the dun martlet,
But I will lure, by my best art, to roost
And plain them in these branches. Larks and finches
Will I fright hence, nor aught shall dare approach
This pensive spot, save solitary things
That love to mourn, as I do.

Enter OSWALD.

Osw. Gracious Mistress!
I come with news.

Arg. Is EDITHA then found?

Osw. I know not that—

Arg. Alas! why would'st thou mock me?

Osw. The Danes, the Danes are still upon our coast;
I learn'd the tidings of a treacherous spy,
Whom I disarm'd and bound; and hast'ning back
Mounted yon hill, where I myself beheld
Their goodly fleet, some fifteen sail or more,
Moor'd in a neighb'ring creek. Pitch'd on the beach
Stood there a gallant tent, where, I not doubt,
The Envoy sojourns. Let me bear you quickly
To his protection; for, I fear me much,
Discov'ry waits us here.

Arg. No, OSWALD, no;
Till EDITHA be found I will not leave
This secret nook. Didst thou not promise me

To hie thee where the parting road might chance
Mislead her step?

Osw. I did; but this event —
O let me instant lead you to the strand!

Arg. What, Oswald! and forego the plighted word
I gave poor Editha! Here did I fix
Our place of meeting; Holy truth forbid
I should deceive her! Haste thee hence again.
Till her I see, I can resolve on nothing.
Take thou the valley, I myself will mount
Yon sidelong hill. My eye is younger, Earl,
And may descry her sooner. This when try'd,
Some two hours hence we'll meet at this same yew.
Let's lose no time; nay, answer not, good Oswald,
But to the search. To-morrow thou shalt rule,
If she be found to day. Heav'n speed thy errand.

SCENE II.

Another Part of the Valley.

Enter CURAN *in a Forester's habit.*

CURAN.

How have the mazy tangles of this wood
Misled my steps! since he, the faithless Falconer,
If faithless, or perchance himself misled,
Left me to journey with unguided foot

Thro' this wild wilderness. The opening vale
Now spreads a broader path; yet, ere I take it,
Tir'd as I am, I'll climb this rocky steep,
Which towers so high that it insures a sight
Of the broad sea. Methinks I'm near it now;
For on my breast the gale beats light and keen,
And has withal a smack of brine upon it,
That seems as freshly stolen from the wave.
I hope 'tis so; for much my strength is spent
With this long ramble. By your leave, fair bank!
Ere I mount further up this rugged hill,
I'll press awhile your violets and daisies
With my tir'd limbs. What if I sleep awhile?
This white thorn brake will screen me, and the brook,
That babbles at its foot, persuades to it
Most musically; prattle on, cool neighbour!
I'll take thy council, and forget my care. [*He sleeps.*

Enter ARGENTILE.

Not here! full sure I saw from yonder heights
My EDITHA, in her green huntsman's tire,
Bolt from the coppice. It was all too distant
To mark her features, yet it sure was she;
For they, the boorish inmates of these hamlets,
Have none so gentle carriage. I'll not holla,
Lest haply I affright her. 'Tis most certain
She past by this same dingle. Gracious Powers
And here I find her couch'd; her faithful head
Wrapt in her scanty mantle! poor spent wench,

How fast does sleep infold thee! It were sin
To break thy slumbers. I will sit, and watch thee,
As oft thy faithfulness, in better days,
Has bended o'er my pillow. How her eye
Will glisten when she wakes! How will it start,
With a glad tear, to see her mistress near her!
Yes, the kind maid will weep. I crave thy pardon,
Thou'rt now a lusty yeoman, and in truth
Thy goat-skin belt, tagg'd with thy bugle horn,
And all thy forest geer become thee mainly:
Nay, thou might'st pass (thy softer features shrouded
Thus as they are) full well for what thou art not.
Yet, my best EDITHA, this rugged stone
Seems but a churlish bolster! I will raise
Thy head, and——Mercy shield me, ha!

[*Starts back while Curan wakes.*

Cur. Where am I?
Methought some angel whisper'd me, and wak'd me:
I see it still, but ah! it flies; stay! stay!
Divinest vision, that e'er blest my slumbers;
'Tis not a vision, for I grasp her hand!
But yet a warmth, a softness all cœlestial
Thrills at the touch. O speak, thou wond'rous creature,
And tell me what thou art!

Arg. An innocent maid,
That took thee for another like herself.
Forgive the crime of error; quit my hand,
Or I shall faint thro' fear.

Cur. Why dost thou tremble,

Thou matchless paragon? by all the Saints
Thou art as safe—as sacred—

Arg. But not free,
While thus you seize my hand.

Cur. Thy pardon, Fairest!
It was a boldness nothing, but the fear
Of losing thee, could prompt, and for that boldness
Such fear must plead excuse. Dost thou forgive?

Arg. I do, if so you suffer me to leave you.

Cur. Stay but a moment. I'm a wand'ring youth,
Whom the wild mazes of this wood misled:
You must, for very charity, direct
My witless step.

Arg. Where art thou bound?

Cur. I know not.
There would I bide, where I could tend on you,
And call you my heart's idol.

Arg. Cease, bold Youth!
I must not hear thee.

Cur. Thou would'st hear, fair Nymph,
All this and more from him, that happy youth,
For whom while slumb'ring here it was so late
Thy error, and my bliss, that I should pass.
O for the wealth of this, and ev'ry isle
The broad sea circles; I would give it all
To be that youth!

Arg. In sooth you wrong me, Stranger,
I know none such.

Cur. Indeed!

Arg. Or if I do,
'Tis one whom, finding, I should call my brother,
Cur. Would I were then that brother! No, not that;
It is too cold a wish; can brothers feel
That throbbing extacy, that trembling ardor,
That wraps me from myself, fires all my soul,
And tells me thou art dearer far than sister,
Father, or friend, dearer than life itself?
Arg. Ah! hope not, Youth, tho' practis'd as thou seem'st,
More than enough, in all those flattering arts
That false men use to guile unwary maids;
Hope not to win my credence to a tale
So palpable and gross: we are but now,
Some moments past, first met, and me thou lov'st
(Shame on thy fabling tongue) dearer than life.
Cur. I do, and call the sweet celerity,
With which I love, best witness of its truth.
Say, I had seen thee once (if possible)
And but approv'd thy beauties; if at second,
Third, or some after meeting, love had grown
From that approof, I then had school'd my heart,
And question'd its tame motions, call'd in Judgment
To weigh in her slow scale the due degree
Of my cool passion. No, thou sylvan wonder,
I saw thee, and I lov'd without one pause
'Twixt sight and love; and I must love thee ever,
Because I lov'd so soon.

Arg. And do I stay
To hear thee?

Cur. Why not stay? the blessed spirits,
That rove yon realms of light, might deign descend
To hear a tale of love so chaste as mine,
And bear their saintly purity to heav'n
Unsullied as it came.

Arg. Was I, like them,
Secure from mortal frailness, trust me, Youth,
I would not bid thee peace; but as I am
A simple maid, whose very simpleness
Makes her (so set with snares is this bad world)
Only the readier prey, I must not hear thee;
Indeed I must not. Fare thee well, good Youth!
A gentle one thou seem'st, and, sooth to say,
Such as, if chance had fixt thee in this vale
My rural neighbour, I had been well pleas'd
To call a friend,

Cur. O! call me so, sweet Maid,
And I will ever—

Arg. Hear me out, kind stranger,
I said, had chance so fixt thee, and withal
Had'st thou with that same rustic shamefac'dness
Demean'd thyself as simple shepherds use,
Nor dar'd to talk, but of our flocks and herds,
Or healing roots, their properties, and powers,
And which is found on hills, which loves to dip
Its tendrils on the stream—which flaunts on meads,

And such like innocent themes—but this thy rashness,
Not to say boldness, now has all undone,
And therefore must I leave thee.

Cur. Stay thee, Nymph,
Or let me follow thee!

Arg. I have an uncle,
With whom I dwell, who, should he meet thee, Youth,
Would chide thy frowardness.

Cur. Ah! let him chide,
So thou but pitiest me.

Arg. And canst thou hope it?

Cur. Ah! why not hope from thee, what I might hope
From yon bright throne of mercy? pity thence
Falls on the penitent. Forgive then, fairest,
This first offence; and tho' I love thee still
To desperation—do not fly—my tongue
Shall ne'er again declare it. Stay, my Fair,
I'll talk alone of flocks, and flowers, and herbs,
So thou but listen me: and art thou gone?
I dread thy frown as death, yet more than death
I dread thy absence; therefore I'll pursue thee.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

Changes to another Part of the Valley near the Hermitage.

Enter EDITHA *followed by the* FALCONER.

EDITHA.

Begone, false traitor! blessings on the man,
Whoe'er he be, that shackled thus thy arms!
Unbind them, ruffian? no, justice forbids
Thy suit, and prudence too. I will not aid thee.

Fal. Nay sweet, dear lady, untie but this one hard knot, that cramps my wrist so miserably, (was I to tell her that Lord OSWALD tied it 't would stand me but in small stead, therefore I'll hide that part of the story)[*aside*] now for mercy's sake, most gentle lady (for that fair face of your's bespeaks you to be a gentle lady, far more truly than my rough one declares me a false traitor) do but suffer your white hands to condescend to so charitable an office, and I will follow you ever after thro' this dreary wilderness, like a tame spaniel; nay, on occasion, be your bold mastiffe, to defend you from wrong and robbery.

Ed. O my disastrous fate! I've miss'd the path,
Pursued by this vile spy of wicked EDEL.
Whither to turn I know not, or how drive
This miscreant from me. Ha! a hut is near:
The hallow'd rood fixt on its thatched top

Speaks it the cell of some sage solitary.
What if I seek asylum for a while
Beneath his lonely roof! The good old man,
For Christian charity, will guide me hence,
When my spent limbs have rested me awhile.
Nay, he perchance, in pity to my case,
May force this knave to leave me.

[*Raps at the door of the Cell.*

Holy Sir!
A young and toil-worn traveller invokes
Your aid, and from your saintly orisons
Is fain to steal a moment, not mispent,
If giv'n in charity to help the wretched.
He answers not. He is not in the cell.
Yet thro' this wicker grate I spy his beads,
His book, and lamp, the oil yet burning in it.
Let me attempt the latch: it is not barr'd;
He cannot be far off. I'll venture in.

Fal. Now that would not I do for a King's ransom; for should she in his absence venture but to touch his breviary or any of his holy geer, she may chance be struck with a dead palsey for the sacrilege. I have often heard of such misadventures. I shall however take no harm, I trust, if I stand here at this due distance and watch the upshot. But here comes the old hermit, and a fine long, white, venerable beard is he blest withal; eighty years growth, I'll warrant it: Yet walks he withal as upright as a wand. This comes of temper-

ance and spare diet! I shall never look half so well at his years.

Enter EDWIN.

Ed. I've trod yon path in vain. The Envoy's son,
I look'd, must have been here by early dawn,
And now the golden sun has half-way reach'd
His noontide summit. Some mischance, I fear—
Who have we here? His face I know full well,
'Tis the King's Falconer; there be spies abroad.
Who art thou, Yeoman, and what ruffian hand
Has thus enthrall'd thee?

Fal. Alas! holy Father, we live in such bad times, that nobles may be called ruffians, acting as thou seest, thus ruffian like. In few words, I am neither more nor less than his Majesty's Yeoman Falconer, come hither, I trow, on no disloyal errand, but to detect disloyalty in the person of a certain great Earl, who, for reasons best known to himself, has feloniously decoy'd from our court the fair Princess ARGENTILE. I have already, ev'n under the hinderance of these vile gyves, found means to come up with one stray kid of the flock, namely the Lady EDITHA.

Ed. Stupendous chance! and where—

Fal. Now, would your holiness please to untie these bonds and lend me the key of your cell, I would instantly make her my prisoner, for in that cell have I kennel'd her.

Ed. The Lady EDITHA, and in my cell;
Say'st thou in very truth?

Fal. Nay, was you to see her, you might chance to think me a liar; for her present humour is to man it in a green jerkin and hose, but I spy'd her thro' all her disguises; therefore would'st thou but assist me in detaining her 'twould be the making of us both; as for your sanctity, I could promise in the king's name to dub you an abbot: for myself, as being no clerk, I shall be content with simple knighthood.

Ed. Peace, fellow, peace. Let me reflect awhile—
It must not be. This meeting is too sudden;
It might o'ercome her spirits; yet to hide
My transports much exceeds a mortal's power.
O you, ye radiant tutelary Powers,
That rule our destinies, arm, arm my soul
With your own prudence! make me for a while
That old and wither'd anchorite I seem!
Chill the warm tide of joy, that boils within me!
Be all my passions mortified and dead,
Till reason bids them wake to life and rapture!
It is resolved. I still will be disguis'd.
Now to the interview—Villain, approach not!
If thou but stirr'st one step nearer yon threshold,
I've spells within shall shrivel up thy limbs,
As lightning blasts the oak! [*Exit Edwin.*

Fal. Yes truly, and I doubt it not; for there be many of these solitaries, who, holy as they may seem, amuse themselves now and then with as unhallowed a trade as downright witchcraft. Now, if the sight of a young

wench in that lonely place should conjure up a devil in his own breast! But 'tis ill talking of the devil; see where he comes—

Enter OSWALD.

Osw. Knave, are we met again?

Fal. In sooth, noble Sir, this second meeting was none of my seeking, whatever the first was; and ev'n then I never wish'd to meet you single-handed.

Osw. I then indeed did leave my work half done;
I now will finish it. Thy feet no longer
Shall crawl at large; they too shall have their fetters.

Fal. Have ye no bowels? this exceeds the barbarity of a Turk or an infidel. Help, good father, help! will you see a good Christian murder'd in the very purlieus of your holy place?

Re-enter EDWIN.

Ed. What bloody business, in the face of day,
Does the arch fiend of darkness now attempt,
To stain our holy sanctuary? avaunt!
Whate'er thou art. (Just Heav'ns, it is my father!
This day doth teem with wonders) [*Aside.*
Gracious beard,
Conceal me from his knowledge! [*Aside.*
Whence? what art thou,
That thus, in fierce and menacing act, assault'st
This peaceful traveller?

Osw. I know him, Seer,
To be a villain, and a dangerous spy.

I am an honest yeoman, and I bide
I' th' neighb'ring valley.

Fal. 'Tis I, good sir Hermit, that am the honest yeoman, and he, saving his nobility, no better than a false——

Osw. Be silent, knave, or this avenging blade
Shall nail thy tongue fast in thy traitor jaws.
Poor coward, may'st thou hope that this same hermit,
Thus old, thus palsied, if he dar'd to aid thee,
Could shield thee from my fury!

Fal. Why indeed it must needs be said, when one feels that plaguy strong twist of your honour's wrist, that one cannot have much hope of that in a natural way; but if he was so minded, being a holy man, he might by his prayers—and yet after all, it may be as well now at once to yield to thee at discretion. [*Oswald binds his feet.*

Ed. Take not his life.

Osw. I do not mean it, Father.
I'll but secure the knave from further mischief.

Fal. Look ye, my Lord, noble yeoman I mean, whatever mischief might have been in my intention, as we are all sinners you know, I have done you none in practice. I told you one piece of news, you know, that pleas'd you so much, that you pinion'd my arms for it, and now that you have shackled my legs I could tell you another, that would please you still better. But this I do not mean, unless you will set both at their liberty.

Osw. Give me thy news, and let me judge its worth.

Fal. Know then, that the princess's gentlewoman is—but will you in very deed promise me my freedom?

Ed. There is no need. I without fee will speak
The rest; she now is lodg'd in yonder cell.

Fal. Methinks now, master Hermit, you might, in charity to my pitiful plight, have suffer'd me to make some small profit by my own secret.

Osw. Haste, call her forth.

Ed. Alas, Sir, long fatigue
Has much exhausted her too tender frame!
Ev'n now my skill was charitably bent
On brewing cordials, which might best restore
Her strength and spirits.

Osw. Trust me, holy Father,
I am her best physician. Lead me to her.

Ed. Wait but a little hour.

Osw. No, I must see
Her instantly; for she is dear to me.

Ed. Dear to thee! O repeat the blessed word!
What has my rashness utter'd?

[*Aside, having through joy altered his voice into its natural tone in the preceding line.*

Osw. Sure that voice—
And yet it cannot be; Heav'ns, how I tremble!
It pierc'd my very soul! surely it came

Thro' the thin air, not from his aged organs;
But still it was the voice of my lost EDWIN.

[*Leaning against the side of a rock.*

Ed. Hence with disguise! it was indeed thy EDWIN's;
For thou hast call'd him thine. [*Pulling off his beard.*

Osw. This is too much!

[*Falling into his Son's arms.*

Strengthen me, Heav'n, to bear it!

Ed. O my Father!

Osw. My Son, my Son, words cannot speak my transport!

Lead me into thy mansion.

Ed. Pause a while,
And bless me on this spot with your forgiveness;
Or on this spot again reject your son!

Osw. Reject thee, EDWIN!

Ed. Yes, Sir, here this instant!
Nay take the very life-blood, which ye gave me,
But take it here; for EDITHA as yet
Knows not I live, therefore she will not weep.

Osw. But she shall weep, and weep such tears as these.
See how they course, my Boy, down these old cheeks!
Dost pardon me, EDWIN? I see thou dost.
Thy EDITHA is thine; this hand shall join you.
Let's to the happy business. Haste, my Son,
This is a meeting of that wond'rous sort,
As seems contrived by holier agents far
Than common chance.

Ed. It is, and my full soul
Piously thanks their holy agency.
Yet, Sir, if I reveal myself thus rashly
To tender EDITHA, I fear me much—

Osw. Fear nothing, Son! at such a fateful time
He acts the best, who acts upon the sudden,
And is but engine to the purposes
Of those supernal workers, who disdain
The aid of our weak reason; nay, perchance,
May frown if it submits not to their guidance.
—But who comes here?

Enter a DANE.

Dane. The Danish envoy, Father,
Commends him to your benizon, and asks
For tidings of his son.

Ed. Hence, Sir, with speed,
And tell him, tho' that son be not return'd,
I shall full soon attend him at his tent
With news of special moment. [*Exit Dane.*
I not doubt, [*To Oswald.*
The princess, Sir, is lodg'd in safety near us.

Osw. She is—and soon as I have seen my daughter.—

Ed. O, Sir, this goodness overcomes me wholly!
What shall I do or say?

Osw. Follow me, Boy,
Into the cell. A moment there shall show
How kindly I will own her for my child,

How make her thine for ever. Then, my Son,
I'll with thee to the strand, salute the Envoy,
And plan, while Heav'n beholds us with a smile,
How best to avenge the wrongs of ARGENTILE.

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

Scene on the Sea-Shore, at the Entrance of the Ambassador's Tent, with the Danish Fleet lying at anchor.

Enter SEWOLD *with an* OFFICER.

SEWOLD.

Say'st thou, not yet return'd? Away with hope!
It cannot be but some untoward chance
Has foil'd his cunning; haply the poor Prince,
Fetter'd and famish'd in some loathsome dungeon,
Calls me to succour him. He shall not call
In vain. Haste, Gothmund; disembark the troops,
I'll lead them to the Castle. [*Exit Officer.*
Coming thus
In menacing guise, with such an armament,
Suddenly on the king, he must, thro' fear,
Give up my royal charge. Yet must I still
Conceal his lineage, lest the tyrant prove
Unwilling to give up a prize so precious.
Meanwhile, if OSWALD brings the princess here,
Who shall receive her?—Hark! the sound of steps,
Haply the Prince—No 'tis the youthful hermit.

Enter OSWALD *and* EDWIN.

Ed. Heav'n and its peace protect thee, noble Dane!

Behold a Saxon, who, tho' mean in garb,
Is rich in blood and honour. He comes fraught
With tidings, that import thee much to know.
Admit him quickly to thy tent.

Sew. As friends,
I pray ye, enter both.

Ed. Not so, my Lord;
I'll wait without. His private business told,
If it then seem thee meet to use my service,
Ev'n to its best that service shall be your's.

Sew. I thank thee, and retire.

[*Exeunt Sewold and Oswald.*

Ed. Indulgent stars!
Thus far beyond all hopes your fav'ring aspect
Has crown'd my wish. The mistress of my soul,
My EDITHA is mine! A father's smile
Gives sanction to our loves. What now remains,
But that, obsequious to the call of justice,
We spirit up the Dane to quell the tyrant?
And see, full well I deem to aid our purpose,
Forth from the swelling sides of yon proud vessel
An armed band is pour'd; another yet,
And yet a third yields up her martial burthen!

Enter OFFICER *and* SOLDIERS.

I'll hail their leader--Benedicite,
Brave Warrior! may a peaceful anchorite,
Unus'd to sights like these, ask with due deference
Wherefore ye quit your anchor'd ships, and why,

Your bright helms glittering to the golden sun,
Ye march in shew of dread hostility?

Offi. Lord Sewold, Envoy of illustrious Denmark,
So wills.

Ed. And may I crave your numbers, valiant Dane?

Offi. Five thousand strong: Men whose try'd hardihood
Full oft have cop'd with twice that number, Father,
Unfoil'd; for never yet on hostile shore
Did they descend, but Victory sat and smil'd
Cresting their sable raven. Trust me, Seer,
This is no wordy vaunt.

Ed. I will not think it;
For, to my judgment, never march'd a train,
Whose noble bearings more bespoke their prowess.
Each common bowman treads with that firm step,
Might fit a spearman.

Offi. Hermit, thou say'st well;
For these be men cull'd from our veteran troops
To honour what was meant an embassage
Of peace and amity; but now, it seems,
We must to our old trade, to blows and bloodshed.
We know our craft. You, Captain, to the right;
You to the left, and wedge in closer file.
Now mount the raven, bid the trumpet speak.

Ed. Transporting sound! the glorious clangor thrills
Thro' every nerve. Off with these weeds of sloth!
I am, I feel myself once more a soldier!

[*Throws off his disguise and appears in armour.*

Offi. Hah! what is this my hoary beadsman chang'd
To a stout well-arm'd champion? by your leave,
Young butterfly just broke from wint'ry slough,
I mean to pinch your wings. Guards, seize the spy!

Ed. Off, Sirs, and know me for the friend of Denmark!

Offi. A foe might say as much; but where's the Dane
Would take him at his word? Art not a Saxon?

Ed. I am.

Offi. And therefore, stubborn Sir, my prisoner—

Ed. I cannot blame thy caution, plain-tongu'd soldier;
Therefore, till noble SEWOLD quits his tent,
I yield me patiently.

Offi. Patience on choice,
Or force, it matters not; thou must be patient:
Yet, if Lord SEWOLD owns thee for his friend,
Thy durance will be short, for see he comes!

Enter OSWALD *and* SEWOLD.

Osw. This is a gallant sight, it glads my soul—
But where is EDWIN?

Ed. Here, Sir, and, if freed,
Ready to serve the Dane, and in that duty
My father, queen, and country.

Sew. What is this?

[*Seeing Edwin detained by the Guards.*

Release him, guards, and let me clasp his valour.
Know, Earl, while yet this son was lost to thee,
He was my courteous host, and in his prudence,
Join'd with his heritage of thy known honour,

I so confide, that, let him give the word,
And I, and all these veterans will obey
His brave behests. Behold, ye men of Denmark,
Into the valiant grasp of this young Lord
I place my staff of office! Denmark's weal
Prompts me to this: as second in command,
Be it my pride to join him. Sound the clarion,
And hail brave EDWIN general. [*Flourish and shout.*

Ed. Noble Dane!
Thou shalt not find this weighty trust repos'd
In idle hands. My deeds shall speak my thanks.
My Father—need I to remind your care
Of absent EDITHA?

Osw. I'll go, my Son,
And lodge her safely with her royal mistress:
Yet, ere I go, thus let me clasp thee to me,
And call down blessings with a father's favour
On thy dear head, thy troops, and their just cause.
Yet mark me, Son, when secret thou hast brought
These veterans near the walls, I deem it best
Thou should'st dismiss some trusty spy to ALDRED,
Our honour'd kinsman, captain of the guards;
So, on the instant when thy valour spreads
Th' assault without, he, by revolt within,
May seize the citadel: this, if thou dost,
(And to this end my letters have prepar'd him)
Success is certain.

Ed. I will lay the council

Close to my heart. Thy blessing, Father! Now,
Envoy, I'm thine. Come on, ye Danish lions,
I'll lead you to your prey! A wily tyrant
Shall fall beneath the fangs of your just vengeance,
Tame as the coward stag! [*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE II.

A Cottage in another part of the Valley.

Out of a Wood on one side enter CURAN.

There in yon copse beneath a spreading elm,
The night did pass upon my slumbering head,
And scatter'd, as she went, from her dun wing
Full many a dream; wild and disjointed all,
Yet pleasing: for they all, in colours bright
Of heaven's own pencilling, did picture her,
Whom only heav'n can image. Now, methought,
A visionary bark with streamers gay,
Its oars still beating time to warbling harps,
Bore us to Denmark. Sudden now the scene
Was shifted, and a cot mantled with joy
Was all our kingdom; yet we there seem'd crown'd
With more than kingly blessings. At the dawn
I rose, and shook the night-dew from my vest,
Then from yon meadow with attentive care

I cull'd the choicest flowers for scent or hue,
And wove them in this garland. When my fair one
Quits yonder homely cabbin, (far, alas!
Too homely to enshrine so rich a saint)
This path she needs must take. Here then I'll drop
The fragrant pledge, in hope that she may bless
Its weaver by the wearing. To my wish
The wicket opens; 'tis her lovely self!
She comes, she comes! Thou friendly thicket shroud me.

[*He retires.*

Enter ARGENTILE.

Alas! alas! the morn is far advanc'd,
And yet no tidings come of loyal OSWALD,
Or my dear EDITHA. What's this, a chaplet?
Not the dear Maid herself could better sort
Its hues, or with more careless grace combine.
I'll place it on my brow. But let me pause;
No rustic hand has thus arrang'd these buds,
This is no forest workmanship. It claims
A nicer weaver. I might guess and come
Near to the mark of truth, if I pronounc'd
That comely youth its maker, who of late
So long address'd my too indulgent ear.
A forester he seem'd, yet sure his phrase
Spoke him of gentle lineage. Blushing blooms;
There may be guileful snakes hid in your perfume:
I dare not use your decking. Lie thou there,
Sweet wreath; and may some happier maid, with brow

Unshent by care, adopt your gay adornings;
They suit not with my sadness.

CURAN, *starting from the Thicket.*

Cur. So, sweet Maid,
Ev'n so, as that fair hand discards my wreath,
Your cruel heart disdains my constancy!

Arg. I did not err. Go, Youth, take back thy flowers,
Fit emblem of thy sexes constancy.
Both are but born to fade.

Cur. Thus to decide
Is all too harsh a sentence. If on me
Thy frown inflicts it, thou shalt find it false,
Ev'n tho' for life impos'd.

Arg. Go, flattering Stranger,
And sooth some simpler damsel with the tale.
Thy truth or falshood to my absent ear
Will be the same; reckless alike of both.

Cur. Wert thou a queen, as well thy beauty merits,
Thou would'st rejoice to rule o'er loyal subjects;
Ev'n if those subjects ne'er approach'd thy throne.
I am thy beauty's vassal, Shroud it from me,
I am thy vassal still. Thy frowns or smiles
May load my vassalage, or make it easy;
Yet still thou art its sov'reign.

Arg. Fabling Youth,
Each quaint allusion in thy speech bewrays
The glossing courtier. The true forester,

Who to the turtle's truth compar'd his own,
Or match'd his wailings with the nightingale's,
Would to my ear his suit more aptly move,
And more pathetical, than thy forc'd phrase
Set out with royal trimmings. Hie thee hence
To some throng'd city. Woo some noble virgin,
May relish better with accustomed ear
Thy talk of queens and vassals. I the while
Will tend my little flock in this still vale,
List'ning their rural bleating.

Cur. Sylvan wonder,
Know, tho' no inmate of these neighb'ring hamlets,
I have a soul can taste all rural pleasures,
With thee would court them as the choicest blessing
Heaven has in store for mortals, or what next
To thy fair self was precious! Try me, sweet one!
See with what nimble zeal on yonder cliffs
I'll seek thy straggling lambs! at close of day
How safely pen them in their hurdled cotes?
At night how guard them from the prowling wolf?
Then ever and anon at sultry noon
Shalt thou, o'er-canopied by thickest shade,
Recline on this true bosom; while I breathe
Light roundelays upon my oaten reed,
And lull thee to sweet slumbers. Try me, Fairest;

Arg. No more, soft Youth; picture not scenes of bliss,
Which, if in very truth thou deem'd'st them such,
With me thou ne'er must share. Have I not said

My uncle is a stern man and austere?
He will not match me with thy alien birth.

Cur. "The old have interest ever in their eye;"
So says a well-prov'd proverb. Trust me, Virgin,
I can a dowery bring will soon o'ercome
His scruples, tho' when poiz'd against thy worth
The weightiest ingots of each Indian mine
Would lightly kick the beam.

Arg. Indeed, indeed,
My heart is much to blame thus to prolong
This tender converse; yet, I know not how,
There is a kind of music in his voice,
And such a melting mildness in his eye—
O that I ne'er had seen him! [*Aside.*

Cur. Turn thee, Nymph!
Still let those eyes shed their sweet radiance on me!
I live but by thy smiles. The jealous flower,
In its true yellow livery, that still turns
Where the sun flames, watching his burning course,
Then nightly droops the head, as he declines,
Best parallels my passion.

Arg. Gentle Youth,
Thou hast no cause to droop, when I am gone,
As now perforce I must. What if, while absent,
I dar'd to impose one friendly office on thee?

Cur. O bless me with the errand!

Arg. I have said,
I seek a long-lost brother; could'st thou find him?

He pairs thee in complexion, dress, and size,
Save somewhat more of slender. Nay, so much
Alike, thou know'st I lately took thee for him.
He journeys from the north along the flats.
Could'st thou from any neighb'ring cliff detect
The wand'rer's step, and lead him to this cottage,
My smiles should thank thee.

Cur. Let me press that hand
With these chaste lips, and instant I am gone.
For such another bliss, my willing toil
Would plough the stormy main. [*Exit Curan.*

Arg. If he succeeds
He brings me back my friend, that friend, erewhile,
Had with her brought my peace; but now, alas!
I fear me much the better half is lodg'd
In other hands; yet those are gentle too—
Poor ARGENTILE! how wayward is thy fate!—
I'll to the grove and weep. [*Exit Argentile.*

SCENE III.

Scene changes to the Hermit's Cell.

Enter EDITHA *from within; the* FALCONER *at some distance laid on the ground asleep.*

EDITHA.

This is a painful pause; and joy and fear
Rule it by turns in my distracted bosom!
Perhaps, ev'n now the Princess, steep'd in tears,

Laments me lost: Perhaps my late-found love,
Now lost to me again, in civil broils
Hazards his dearest life. O Patience, Patience!
Grac'd, as I am, with Heav'n's unhop'd for favours,
Let me not drive thee hence, who still from heav'n
Call'st down fresh favours on the trusting wretch,
That hugs thee in her bosom. Whence that noise!
'Tis but the sleeping falconer's noisy drone.
Sleep on, thou meddling knave. I need not fear thee.

Enter OSWALD.

Osw. Health to thee, Virgin, and a length of days
Prosperous as this beginning! I return
To lead you to our queen.

Ed. Dread Earl, your son
Did say——

Osw. He did, that with me he'd return;
But business more important, (thanks to Heav'n)
Detains him for a while. Thy lover, lady,
Is now the Danish general.

Ed. O my fears!

Osw. Say, dost thou fear? trust me, I too should fear,
If I could call his mother's truth in question;
But he is mine, legitimately mine,
And cannot play the coward. Yes, my EDWIN,
Thou'lt lop the tyrant's head; I nothing doubt it.
Come on, and in our way to ARGENTILE
Thou shalt hear more. But first I'll give this spy
His liberty. [*Unties the Falconer.*

Rise, Falconer, get thee hence!
Go tell thy master thou hast found i'the forest
A nest of traitors. Tell him where they're hid,
And gain a traitor's guerdon for thy tidings.
Haste on, dear EDITHA.

[*Exit, pushing out the Falconer.*

Ed. I do, Sir, tremblingly.

SCENE IV.

Changes near to ARGENTILE's Cottage.

Enter CURAN.

I've climb'd yon cliff in vain. This to the right
Remains untry'd; yet this way ere I reach it
I may, perhaps, again behold that form,
Which makes all others viewless.

Enter ARGENTILE *to him hastily.*

Arg. Careless Youth!
Return'd so soon! return'd without my brother!
False one, thou ne'er hast sought him.

Cur. Far as eye
Could from yon beetling brow detect a gull,
So far these eyes have pierc'd, nor saw one glimpse
Of human face. But hopeless is the chance,
That he, who lost himself is only found
Where thou art present, fitly e'er should use
Those faculties thy absence takes away:

For, absent when thou art, tyrannic fancy
Seizes my sight, and fixes in each orb
Thy image only. If I spy a rose,
It is thy blushing cheek; a crystal rill,
It is thy sparkling eye. Each element;
Fire, water, air, are tinctur'd with thy features.
Gods! she is mute; no sympathetic sigh
Gives murmuring proof, that she approves my passion.
Why is it thus, O ye remorseless Powers!
I've heard that love was ever eloquent;
That tongues, how rude soe'er, nay, that dumb eyes
Inspir'd by love could speak as plain as tongues,
And more persuasively. If this were true,
My eyes, my cheeks, each feature had been vocal,
And told their tale with such sweet energy
It must have been believed. They mock'd me much
Who told me this; for I have no such powers.

Arg. Thou hast, too eloquent Youth! indeed thou hast!

Cur. No, not enough to gain me the cold credence,
I love beyond expression.

Arg. Think not so:
I do believe thou lov'st me.

Cur. So believing,
Canst thou then cruelly reject that love,
Because 'tis offer'd by a nameless lover?
I heretofore did boast that I was rich;
That boast did fail to move thee. To say more,
Know, that my birth is noble. Will that truth
Avail me? will my fairest meet my wishes,

When I declare this hand, this heaving heart,
That sue to join in marriage bonds with hers,
Are ev'n of royal lineage?

Arg. Ha! what say'st thou?

Cur. That I'm a Prince; and yet so much I love thee,
I'll bear my sweet, my simple shepherdess
Swift to my father's court, make her my bride,
Clothe her in gold and purple: orient pearls,
'Stead of those meadow flowers, shall braid her hair.
Good Heav'ns! she weeps. Is it a cause for tears,
That thou behold'st thus prostrate at thy feet
A heart and crown offer'd by Denmark's heir!

Arg. By Denmark's heir!

Cur. Yes, to the Saxon court
He came disguis'd to see its beauteous Princess;
(For beauteous, fame had boasted her to be)
How, in that aim, his various efforts fail'd
Imports but little. He has seen in thee
What makes all beauty homely, save thy own.

Arg. Heav'ns! is this true?

Cur. It is by all the Powers
That rule our destinies! they mock at pride.
Princes and peasants their impartial scale
Holds all in equal balance! 'tis their sport
To teach the vain possessors of such toys,
As wealth and birth, how little is their worth
When laid, as now, an unaccepted gift
At the bright shrine of beauty.

Arg. Rise, Sir, rise!

If thou'rt the Prince of Denmark, fate has been
Beyond, whate'er we read in feigned legend,
Ingenious to beguile thee. Now, methinks,
I almost wish to be that ARGENTILE,
You seem to scorn.

Cur. Be rather thy fair self,
Who canst give more to my transported soul
In one sweet smile, than ARGENTILE could bring
With all her royal dower.

Arg. You ne'er beheld
That Princess, Sir.

Cur. Nor do I wish it, Fairest!
Thou hast such full possession of my soul,
That, were she lovely as thy loveliest self,
(Impossible to think) it were as easy
A single hand should lift some first-rate barque
From ocean's breast, and on the timber'd base,
Whence late it launch'd, refix its ponderous keel,
As snatch my heart from that delicious harbour,
Where all my hopes have anchor'd.

Arg. Wouldst thou, Prince,
Relinquish for my love so vast a dower?

Cur. I have, sweet Maid, relinquish'd it already,
Ev'n ere thy love be gain'd.

Arg. I find thee apt,
Great Sir, to part with what the world holds precious:
Canst thou still part with more?

Cur. No, not with thee:
Thou canst not mean it. Dost thou scorn me only
Because I am a prince?

Arg. I do, and must,
While I remain an humble shepherdess.

Cur. A village maid has oft been crown'd a queen.

Arg. Yet never without loss of happiness.
And, trust me, Sir, while I can safely sojourn
In this still valley, tend my little flock,
Sleep in yon cot, and press this perfum'd bank,
I seek no loftier station.

Cur. Say not this
To him, who, born a prince, has scorn'd his equal,
And loves but thee alone.

Arg. But can he scorn
Himself? I mean his better part of self?

Cur. No, for that part art thou.

Arg. Mistake me not;
I mean thy royalty. Love lives not long
Without equality. To love his equal,
That prince must be a shepherd.

Cur. Be it so.
I'll make that change the test of my true passion.
I here disclaim all royalty. I'll live
In this still valley, tend thy little flock,
Sleep with thee in yon cot, and with thee press
This perfum'd bank.

Arg. O! thou hast won my heart!
Away, away with maiden shamefac'dness!
I will confess, I love thee.

Cur. Take then, Heav'n,
Take back again each trivial good ye gave me!
Take back superfluous wealth, superfluous grandeur!
This, this is all I'll keep; but I will prize it,
As monarchs do their crowns!

Enter OSWALD *and* EDITHA *from the Path behind, and stand at a distance.*

OSWALD.

Am I awake?
What! ARGENTILE lock'd in a rustic's arms!

Ed. Patience and silence, Sir; for be assur'd,
If he, that was the minstrel, be the Prince,
As you have said the Danish Envoy told ye,
That same is he.

Osw. Say'st thou? O blest event!

Arg. Heav'ns, Sir, my uncle! Nay, my brother too!
O all ye stars! Permit me, that I meet them;
I'll speedily return.

Cur. Go, my soul's treasure,
But make thy absence short! Peace, peace, my heart,
Leap not for very rapture thro' my breast!
Patience, fond flutterer! Let me mark their meeting.
See, how my Love falls on that brother's neck!
I envy him his bliss, tho' he's her brother.
And now they hurry both into their cottage.

Her uncle this way bends. I'll meet him boldly.
He that has honour in his fair intent
Can feel no terror from a mortal's frown.

Osw. Who art thou, forester?

Cur. Whate'er I am,
Deem me no foe to thee and thy fair kindred.

Osw. I hope thou art not, yet I needs must ask
Your business here, and why your ardent gaze
Is fixt on yonder cot?

Cur. Because that cot
Contains the dearest treasure of my soul,
A goddess in the semblance of a maid,
To whom my love is plighted. Good old man,
Admit me to her presence.

Osw. That I must not.
'Tis her own wish, I should detain thee here
Till she returns.

Cur. Away, that cannot be!
Did ever turtle wish her mate detain'd——

[*A flourish of trumpets heard.*

Osw. What shout was that?

Cur. 'Tis Denmark's trumpet sounds!
What may this mean?

Osw. O, ye propitious stars!

Cur. I know that flourish: 'tis the note of conquest.

Enter SEWOLD, EDWIN, *and* SOLDIERS.

SEWOLD.

My Prince! my Pupil! [*Sewold embracing Curan.*

Ed. O my noble Father! [*Falling at Oswald's feet.*
Accept this sword, steept in the tyrant's blood——

Sew. And art thou found at this auspicious moment!
Where is thy Queen, thy ARGENTILE?

Cur. Good SEWOLD,
I pray thee check this sudden burst of joy,
Nor dream of ARGENTILE; she is not here,
Nor do I wish.—O that my tongue could croud
A thousand thousand thoughts in one short sentence!
Give me the hearing. Thou perchance may'st chide;
But, know, in this sweet vale I've met a maid—
Nay, interrupt me not—she was not born
Indeed of noble kin, and, sooth to say,
Is but a shepherd's niece. But what of that?
Thou know'st, my SEWOLD, Heav'n's impartial eye
(I but repeat thy lecture, wisest SEWOLD)
Notes no distinction in the equal chain,
That links humanity. Nature, good herald,
Marshals alike the peasant and the prince,
And gives the self-same blazon. See, she comes!
Mark her, my SEWOLD, what a modest blush
Damasks her cheek. Give me thy judgment, Friend.
Is not her rural sweet simplicity
Beyond all majesty? withal majestic,
Or would be so, if it were for her purpose
To put on majesty, but she disdains it.
Kneel with me, SEWOLD, kneel, ye men of Denmark,
All kneel, and hail this heavenly maid your queen!

Enter ARGENTILE *and* EDITHA *(in a Woman's dress.)*

ARGENTILE.

Rise, Prince, thy looks declare thou wilt not scorn me,
Tho' I am ARGENTILE.

Cur. Mock not my love!

Arg. I do not, Sir; this act shall prove I do not,
Mark it, I pray. Behold this faithful maid,
Whom late in man's attire I call'd my brother!
Behold this gallant warrior! he, whose valour
So nobly has aveng'd thy country's wrongs,
To him I give her hand. His sire approves
The act. See, he devours my snowy gift
With all a lover's rapture!

[*Joining the hands of Editha and Edwin.*

Cur. As I thine! [*Seizing Argentile's hand.*

Ed. What words shall speak my thanks? Yes, I have words
My queen will think even worth so dear a gift.
Your father lives.

Arg. My father!

Osw. ADELBRIGHT!

Ed. These honour'd hands
Did lead him from the convent to the castle.

Arg. And in his perfect health?

Ed. Of health such share,
As his full years allow. Yet strong enough
To go to morrow, so his priest had prompted,
And wend him to the woods, a solitary——

Arg. O Prince! O Oswald! where shall my full heart,
O'erburthen'd with its blessings, first select
Her theme of praise to Heav'n. First, my best Father,
For thy dear life, prolong'd to bless my nuptials,
I bow my thankful knee! and next, my Prince,
(Nay kneel thou too) bless we the host of saints,
For that, by means beyond compare mysterious,
They saved us from the curse entail'd on princes,
And gave our hearts that rare felicity
Of choice in freedom, which they give the peasant!

Cur. They did. They lighted the bright torch of love,
And bade it blaze ere policy could damp
With its chill touch the fervor of the flame.

Sew. Blest pair, how will the story of your loves,
When born upon the wings of poesy
To after ages, call forth envious sighs
From all of royal ear that drink the tale?

Cur. True, my best Sewold! Now, sweet Argentile,
Let's hasten to thy father. Dost thou loiter?

Arg. Only to pay these hospitable shades
The tribute of my thanks. Farewell, sweet vale!
Farewell, ye tranquil shades, where Love was born,
And where, did duty not withdraw her step,
Love still would wish to sojourn; yet no long
Farewell; for soon, in these same pastoral weeds,
(If it so please the partner of my soul

To join me in the pleasing pilgrimage)
I will revisit your dear solitudes.

Cur. Yes, ARGENTILE, yes, ye delicious glades!
We'll steal a frequent holyday from state,
Here to repeat in every different haunt
What pass'd in this sweet valley. Thou shalt find me
Couch'd by yon babbling rill: thy kiss shall wake me;
Then, feigning sweet surprise, here shalt thou fly,
And here in amorous chase will I pursue thee:
Then shalt thou yield—

Arg. Yet not till all that tale
Of tender love, which charm'd of late my ear,
Be twice told over.

Cur. Sweet one! so it shall;
And ev'ry time with an increase of ardor.
Our love shall be peculiar, as our fate;
Time shall not pall it, pageantry and state
Quench its first fervor. Hither will we fly,
Leaving at court all cares of royalty:
Here, shelter'd in our ivy-mantled nest,
'Spite of that royalty, we *will* be blest.

[*Exeunt Omnes.*

SAPPHO,

A

LYRICAL DRAMA

IN THREE ACTS.

Spirat adhuc amor,
Vivuntque commissi calores
Æoliæ fidibus Puellæ.

Hor. Ode 9, lib. 4

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

Sappho.

Phaon.

Agenor, a noble Sicilian, father to Doris.

Doris.

Lycidas in love with Doris.

Arethusa, a Naiad.

Statue of Hymen animated.

SCENE *SICILY.*

N. B. The types in the following pages are arranged in the manner of Metastatio's Operas, Paris Edit. 1755, in order to distinguish the Airs, Duetts, &c. from the Recitative.

PRELIMINARY SCENE.

VENUS *and* CUPID *descend or enter.*

CUPID.

FROM thy own Cyprus, goddess! on the wing
Of duteous zeal I meet thee; from the isle
Where ev'ry gale breathes love, where ev'ry shade
Weaves a close canopy for fond desire
To revel in unsated; where each stream,
That leads its mazy silver thro' the mead,
Murmurs a strain of liquid minstrelsy
Soft as the Dorian lute.

Ven. But not so sweet
As SAPPHO's Lesbian lyre, and this to hear
I now invite thee. Come, my Son, with me
Receive harmonious incense from that lyre;
Hear the sweet suppliant, and unite with mine
Thy power (if Jove and his stern fates permit)
In aid of her distress.

Cup. Declare the cause.

Ven. Thou dost remember, (for this pensile orb
Has not as yet been circled by the sun

With annual radiance) since we both were mask'd
In shapes of mortal mould, and minded both
To pass the Cydnus: near the further bank
There lay a rude and homely fisher boy
Stretch'd on his rush-wove float, with hook and line
'Guiling the fish that scudded thro' the stream.
We call'd him to us, and with willing speed
He left his lures, and to the distant shore
Gave us safe waftage: with his manner pleas'd
And unschool'd courtesy, as soon as landed,
I stood confest the goddess; bade him ask
What wond'rous boon he pleas'd, and my full power
Should instant grant it: the fond youth ask'd beauty;
Beauty supreme, to strike the dullest sense,
And melt the coldest bosom.

Cup. True, he did,
And still my recollection marks the change
With pleasure mix'd with wonder; his brown forehead,
Which the hot sun had parch'd and freckled o'er,
Quick took a Parian polish. His rude locks,
That stood in bristly tangles round his head,
Now smoothly flow'd in hyacinthine rings,
Mantling his neck and shoulders; downy crimson
Soft'ned his rustic ruddiness of cheek;
His eye glanced tenderness; his smile breath'd love.
Meanwhile the Graces at thy bidding came,
And from their sacred alabaster vase
Shed that blest unguent, which to all his limbs

(Accordant to proportion's faultless law)
Gave new dimensions, only seen before
In shapes of heav'nly frame.—But to the tale.

Ven. Chang'd as he was, the youth repair'd to Lesbos,
Where SAPPHO saw, and, need I add, ador'd him.
For, CUPID, well thou know'st, the tender soul,
That Poesy inspires, is very wax
To Beauty's piercing ray: the blooming boy,
More raptur'd with her lyre than with her form,
Feign'd real passion; swore eternal truth.
Yet scarce the waning moon had heard his vows,
Ere all those vows were broke, and perjur'd PHAON
Parted for Sicily; where now he reigns
Here like ourselves, my Son, all-absolute,
Conquering each heart he lists, nor needs thy shafts
To aid his victories.

Cup. But what of SAPPHO?

Ven. Disconsolate she sought the darkling grove,
Where the lorn nightingale prick'd on her thorn
Wails to the list'ning stars, and join'd her plaint
With kindred notes as sweetly querulous.
And oft her hand would hang upon the trees
Sad madrigals, the which my pitying doves
Stole from the stems and bore to PHAON's eye,
But all in vain: at length, to court my aid,
Hither she bends her course. Ev'n while I speak,
I spy her glittering bark: see, o'er the waves
It rides with fav'ring gale! Our place be now

The middle region, where enshrin'd in clouds
We'll hear the vot'ry and accept her prayer.

[*They ascend.*

NOTE.

The above scene is not to be considered as essential to the Drama as it now stands; it was written many years before as a first scene, when the Author intended to throw the story into the form of a Masque; in which a part only (and that a small one) was meant to be set to Music. It is now inserted as a previous narrative of what is fabled concerning the cause of PHAON's superior beauty, (see Elian. Var. Hist. B. 12. C. 18,) and therefore in the closet may be read, by way of what our old Dramatists called an Induction to the Drama itself, though not a necessary part of it.

SAPPHO.

ACT I. SCENE I.

A Grove with a view open to the sea on one side, and an elegant Temple dedicated to Venus on the other. While the Overture is performing, a splendid Barge appears on the sea bearing Sappho and her attendants from Lesbos; they land, and approach the Temple; when Sappho takes her Lyre from her principal attendant, and strikes it in accompaniment to her voice.

SAPPHO.

IMMORTAL VENUS! power benign!
From this thy gaily-glittering shrine,
Daughter of Jove, thy vot'ry hear!
O, skill'd in each delusive art,
That best beguiles the love-lorn heart,
Defend thy SAPPHO from despair!
Come with such willing haste,
As oft thou cam'st before,
When thy light car thy nimble sparrows bore
Thro' the cærulean vast.
Forth from thy mighty sire's refulgent hall
Swift on their little dusky wings they flew,

Propitious to my call,
And gave thee to my dazzled view.
Raptur'd I mark'd each radiant grace,
That beam'd in thy celestial face;
I saw thee smile; I heard thy tongue
The soft consoling strain prolong;
" What from my power would SAPPHO claim?
" Who scorns thy flame?
" What wayward boy
" Disdains to yield thee joy for joy?
" Soon shall he court the bliss he flies;
" Soon beg the boon he now denies,
" And, hast'ning back to love and thee,
" Repay the wrong with extacy."
Ah, gentle Goddess! once again
Repeat the soft consoling strain:
My queen, my patroness, my friend,
Again thy powerful influence lend;
Relieve me from these dire alarms,
And give my PHAON to my arms!*

[*The Hymn ended, she takes from another of her attendants two Doves, and with the rest of her train enters the Temple.*]

NOTE.

* This first scene is a free translation of SAPPHO's Hymn to VENUS preserved by DIONYSIUS.

SCENE III.

AGENOR, DORIS.

Dor. In pity hear me!

Ag. No, my soul's resolved;
I will not yield to this proud Lesbian youth
Thy beauty, or my wealth.

Dor. Nor do I hope it.

Ag. Why then admit vain PHAON to thy bower?

Dor. In duty to the goddess of this fane,
I must admire the form she made so fair;
On whom she lavish'd more enchanting grace
Than deck'd her own Adonis.

Ag. And for this,
Ev'n for the gloss and varnish of complexion,
Is virtuous LYCIDAS, with coy disdain,
Banish'd thy presence.

Dor. To the shepherd's merit
I give my heart's esteem.

Ag. 'Tis a cold tribute:
The youth deserves thy love, and once possest it.
But mark my words; I led thee here to mark them.
Lo! at this fane I swear, not to survive
The day thou wed'st with PHAON.

Dor. Dearest Sire!
Recall the word.

Ag. Daughter, the vow is made;
Jove, when he swears by sable Styx, not binds
His oath more firmly.

Dor. Hear me but a moment—

Ag. Away—discard all duty—marry PHAON—
Yet, in the hour of transport, DORIS, know
A father's death shall turn thy bliss to woe.
The Furies from their Hell shall start,
And thunder to thy trembling heart,
That then thy father died;
Shall dash with guilt and shame the hour,
When PHAON to the nuptial bower
Leads thee, a willing bride.

[*Exit Agenor.*

SCENE III.

DORIS.

Tremendous threat! yet justly given to her,
Who, tho' she knows the force of filial duty,
Knows the dear tribute due to faithful love;
To both must live a debtor. Death alone
Must aid me. Crimes we ought, yet cannot, hate
Are only cancell'd by the stroke of Fate.
Ye virgin shades, relieved from pain,
That in Elysian vallies rove!
Ah! take me to your pensive train,
Victims like me of hopeless love!

Lead to the glades where, softly slow,
Oblivion's Lethe steals along:
There let me join your warbling woe,
Or sigh responsive to your song. [*Exit Doris.*

SCENE IV.

LYCIDAS, *and afterwards* SAPPHO, *from the Temple.*

Lyc. Stay, Nymph! she hears me not — or hearing flies me,
Perchance, to follow PHAON. O my spear,
That oft hast on the felon wolf repaid
His outrage on my fold, prepare thy point
To quell a baser robber!

Sap. What is this?
A youth of wild demeanor: yet, methinks,
He has not long been thus. His eye, tho' fir'd
With rage, has yet a tenderness withal,
That speaks his bosom gentle. Hapless youth,
Perhaps, the nymph he loves has been unkind!
What if I question him? Stay, courteous Swain?
A stranger sues thy converse.

Lyc. Thou'rt a woman
I have forsworn the sex.

Sap. 'Tis as I fear'd;
Love has done this; yet hear me, tho' a woman,

I never did thee wrong: in pity tell me
Where Lesbian PHAON sojourns.

Lyc. PHAON, sayst thou?
O that this spear were buried in his breast;

Sap. VENUS forbid! what, wouldst thou murder PHAON?

Lyc. I would, but dare not: lest a deadlier frown
From DORIS should avenge the righteous blow.

Sap. And loves he DORIS?

Lyc. That his trait'rous heart
Can only tell: enough for me to know,
That DORIS, won by his delusive wiles,
Disdains my virtuous passion. Gracious gods!
Why sleeps your vengeance? why, at truth's just call,
Does not destruction's bolt on falsehood fall?
Is there not thunder in the sky?
Lightning, of pale and livid glare,
Prepar'd the perjur'd breast to tear,
And prove that justice reigns on high?
Fall then, dread meteors, from above!
Ye whirlwinds rush; ye tempests growl;
And wreck on PHAON's impious soul,
The fury of offended Jove! [*Exit Lycidas.*

SCENE V.

SAPPHO.

Ah, I have heard enough! he loves another;
And she (as needs she must; so absolute
His beauty's sov'reignty) returns his passion.
I look'd for this; and therefore did I bring,
Lodg'd in my bark, the vestments of a shepherd,
In these I'll veil my sex; adieu my lyre!
Tho' sweeter than the harp, than gold more dear,*
Awhile must I resign thee; and inform
The liquid languor of Sicilian reed
To breathe as I inspire! Yet if the powers,
That Phœbus gives me, like their Author prove,
With this I'll woo; I'll win my rival's love.
Parent of Harmony descend!
The Muse's and the Lover's friend;
Thro' melody's meand'ring tide
Let sense and sound united glide;
Link in thy sympathetic chain
The tend'rest thought, the softest strain,

NOTE.

* Πολὺ πακτίδος ἁδυμελεστέρα,
Χρυσῶ χρυσοτέρα.

Frag. Sapphûs ap. Demet. Phalereum.

And lead the touching tones along
Thro' ev'ry melting mood of song;
So shall the tuneful contest prove,
That Music rules the realms of Love.

[*Exit Sappho.*

SCENE VI.

Changes to an enclosed Lawn with a bower in the centre ornamented with festoons of flowers. Enter

PHAON.

This is her bower; and this the time agreed.
Doris was ever punctual to the moment;
Nay even forewent it: should she fail me now,
My careless heart tells me it well could brook
A longer absence; lovely as she is,
And unenjoy'd, I feel already sated.
Ah, rapt'rous Sappho! wherefore did I leave thee!
Thine was a soul of fire. Others can love,
But not like thee: this Doris owns a passion,
But thou alone couldst feel it: Joy in her,
In thee was extacy. I left thy arms
To gain fresh taste for their superior charms.
The bee that roves round every field,
And sips the balm that each bestows,
For sweets, that common cowslips yield,
Resigns the nectar of the rose;

But, when the transient feast is o'er,
He seeks the rose he left behind,
And finds, in the forsaken flower,
Both nectar and ambrosia join'd.
But see where DORIS comes: health to my fair one,
And love, and transport!

SCENE VII.

DORIS, PHAON.

Dor. Rather fear, and torture;
For these alone possess the heart of DORIS.
Pha. What? when I meet thee? when thy PHAON's lips
Print on this hand, this fervent seal of love?
Dor. Forego the hand, that never must be thine:
A father's frowns—
Pha. Weigh'd with his daughter's smiles
Are light as air to PHAON: such to thee
Should be those frowns, when weigh'd with PHAON's love,
Dor. If PHAON lov'd me with a worthy passion,
He would not counsel thus.
Pha. When filial duty
Contends, as now it seems, with faithful Love,
One must be scorn'd.
Dor. But DORIS has a heart,

(And hence arises all her misery)
That can scorn neither.

Pha. Then the love of PHAON
Has not that force, that interest in thy bosom,
He once had cause to hope.

Dor. Cruel! it has;
Thou know'st it has; thou hear'st it in my sighs;
Thou see'st it in my tears; my voice declares it.
Go with the pleas'd conviction, that thy charms
Have made poor DORIS wretched: place her name
The last, the lowliest in the suff'ring list,
Thy beauty has enslav'd: let Lesbian SAPPHO
Hold, as she ought, the highest.

Pha. Jealousy,
Not duty, there prompted the cold reproof.

Dor. I meant not to reprove thee; would to Heav'n,
That never from that SAPPHO's am'rous breast,
Thy faith had parted! then I had not seen thee,
And had not been undone. No father's frown
(As now it does) had spread confusion round me;
No virtuous lover mourn'd my cruelty.
But, as it is, thy pity I implore,
Quitting those charms I ever must adore.
'Tis duty, PHAON, bids me fly
The heav'n of smiles, that decks thy face,
And ev'ry more than mortal grace,
That triumphs in thy eye.

Yet mem'ry ev'ry grace and smile
Shall hoard, as misers do their store,
And these, till life's vain dream be o'er,
My sorrows shall beguile. [*Exit Doris.*

SCENE VIII.

PHAON.

She goes, in hope I should pursue her step
To her stern father's presence; and, with prayer,
And bended knees, and supplicating hands,
Implore a boon, that I can gain without it.
No, Lesbian poetess! APOLLO's daughter!
PHAON, whose charms once freely won thy heart,
Disdains the thought. And thou, bright Queen of Love!
Who gav'st me beauty to support thy reign,
Shalt find that gift was not bestow'd in vain.
From fair to fair in ev'ry isle,
That lifts its forests from the wave,
I'll rove, their beauties to inslave;
The coyly grave,
The freely gay,
Shall each be victims to my smile;
I'll woo them all, perplex, beguile,
Possess, and fling the toys away.

Too long has woman wore the crown,
And rul'd with love's resistless power:
'Tis time, that man should have his hour,
To reign a tyrant in his turn.

So shall the swains, that dayly sigh
With unavailing passion true,
In PHAON their avenger view,
And hail his am'rous victory.*

NOTE.

* This air is meant to be set *en Rondeau*, and the first eight lines repeated.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

A Grove near the House of Agenor.

AGENOR, DORIS, LYCIDAS.

Ag. Hence from my sight! or with repentant speed
Restore thy heart to LYCIDAS.
Dor. My hand
('Tis all I can) I yield him.
Ag. See, the swain
With virtuous pride disclaims it!
Lyc. Not from pride,
But grief, AGENOR, I decline a gift,
That DORIS yields so coldly.
Dor. Take it, Youth,
And know, tho' PHAON claims my adoration,
He ne'er shall be thy rival. If his charms
Surpass (as sure they do) whate'er is human,
May I not pay to him that tribute chaste,
We give to bright APOLLO?
Lyc. But his heart,
Wayward and false; his bold licentious tongue;
Does that bespeak divinity?
Ag. If so,
'Tis such as frights us in the Satyr troop,

That follow Faunus, or the Cyclops rude,
Which oft, at eve, from Etna's burning womb
Are seen to climb, and cool them on yon cliff,
Carolling strains uncouth.

Lyc. Or boldly daring,
Like ruthless Polypheme, to lure the faith
Of one more heav'nly fair than Galatea
From one, as true as Acis.

Dor. Hapless Youth!
Much do I pity thee, and much myself.
Yet all I can, in offering here my hand,
I give thee. Ah! my Father, check thy frowns.

Ag. Away! my soul thy perfidy disowns.
Fly to the Lesbian traytor, fly!
Forsake the mansion of thy Sire:
From fair Sicilia's plains retire,
And take an exile's destiny.
The dower of penury and pine,
Giv'n by a father's curse, be thine!

[*Agenor and Doris exeunt different ways.*

SCENE II.

LYCIDAS.

Agenor, stay! my heart releases Doris
From all her vows, so thou forgiv'st her crime.
He hears me not. Ah, lost, lost Lycidas!
And, if he heard thee, could'st thou yield the nymph

To impious PHAON? lov'd as thou hast been,
Canst thou, reflecting on that love, resign
That bliss to him, which should alone be thine?
Ah! how the Hours, on golden plume,
Flew lightly o'er this fragrant shade,
Where, with my lovely DORIS laid,
I cropt the rose, and woodbine's bloom,
To weave a garland for her head.
O cruel change! the tempests lour!
The roses droop, the woodbines fade!
Falsehood and Fraud have seiz'd the bower,
And robb'd me of my darling Maid!

SCENE III.

LYCIDAS, SAPPHO *(disguised as a Shepherd.)*

Sap. Shepherd, I kindly greet thee!
Lyc. Whence—what art thou?
Methinks I made acquaintance with thy face
This morning near the temple; but thy garb
Then spoke thee female.
Sap. True; and such I am,
A nymph of Lemnos.
Lyc. Thy resplendent galley
Glittering with streamers, and thy numerous train
Bespoke thee noble.

Sap. True; but what avails
Or birth, or wealth, when love, when bliss is lost;
When PHAON has deceiv'd me?

Lyc. Heav'ns! another
Inthrall'd as DORIS?

Sap. Yes, and to release
DORIS from thraldom, to avenge myself,
And blast his perfidy, I mask me thus
In man's attire. Conduct me swift to DORIS.

Lyc. Ah! what will that avail?

Sap. Know, gentle Swain,
I boast no vulgar skill in minstrelsy,
And mean by that to win her heart from PHAON,
And make it mine. That done, from such a bond
(My sex declar'd) thou shalt thyself reclaim
That truant heart, and fix it thine for ever.

Lyc. Impossible! ye gods, that I could hope it!
O! she too madly doats on PHAON's beauty;
Yet thou art beauteous too; and in thy eye
There sits a soft and modest tenderness,
Which more, methinks, should move a virgin's mind,
Than PHAON's wanton glances.

Sap. Not on that
Shall I depend, which had not power to keep
My PHAON faithful; but my surer hope
Springs from my soul, and its enchanting art
Which, while it sooths, inflames each hearer's heart.

Whate'er of sacred magic reigns
In verse and heav'n-born harmony,
I mix in my melodious strains:
Apollo hears me from his sky;
Thro' music's maze he guides the song,
Obsequious to my tuneful call;
Now lifts the swelling sounds along;
Now sinks in a pathetic fall.

Lyc. Never till now did my rapt ear imbibe
Such strains celestial: the tun'd spheres themselves,
That o'er our heads ring their immortal chime,
To the blest gods give not more extacy,
Than thou to Lycidas! it must succeed.
Come on, sweet Lemnian Syren; swift I'll lead thee
To the fair bower, which Doris haunts at noon.

SCENE IV.

Changes to another part of the Grove.

AGENOR, PHAON.

Ag. The guilty ever fly from those they fear;
But I have found, and, finding thee, command
Thy quick departure: Sicily disdains
To harbour falsehood. Vengeance here awaits
Thy crimes. Begone, and by thy flight avoid
Thy doom.

Pha. Unconscious of those crimes, old man,
Why should I fly?

Ag. Thou hast seduc'd my daughter.

Pha. I have won
Thy daughter's heart, and, having won, will keep it.
AGENOR, know, I am no vulgar suitor!
I own, what well may justify my claim
To nymphs as rich as DORIS.

Ag. Wert thou wealthy
As Lydian Crœsus, I would scorn thy suit:
I've given her to another.

Pha. 'Tis a grant,
Which parents have not in their power to give;
Else why have I her heart? thou didst not give it,
And yet 'tis mine.

Ag. Insolent wretch! I'll hear
No more. If the next rising sun
Beholds thee here, thy punishment's begun.
The rat'ling chain, the prison's gloom,
Where adders hiss, and scorpions sting,
Villain, shall be thy dismal doom!
There Famine, on her raven wing,
Shall hover o'er thy fainting head;
Till Nature, shrinking at the sight,
Quenches the lamp of life and light,
And gives thee to the perjur'd dead.

[*Exit Agenor.*

SCENE V.

PHAON.

Sternly he threatens, and has power confest
To put those threats in practice. I will haste
To DORIS: press her, ere the morning dawns,
To fly with me to Cyprus. My trimm'd bark
Already is unmoor'd; my ship-mates ready;
And the breeze blows, as if it wish'd to speed
My am'rous theft, and sanctify the deed.
Fill'd with each wanton zephyr's gale
My nimble bark shall spread its sail,
And cut the wave with prow of gold:
Around it's keel young dolphins play;
Triumphant Tritons lead the way;
And laughing Love the helm shall hold.

[*Exit Phaon.*

SCENE VI.

Changes to the Bower of Doris.

DORIS.

Ye solitary shades, once more receive
Your love-lorn visitant! Let my poor limbs
Fall on your fragrance! O that they might soon
Sink into sleep eternal! that AGENOR
Might find his daughter here, depriv'd of breath,
And wipe from her pale brow the dews of death!

Ye Powers! this load of life remove,
Who gave the boon to be enjoy'd;
Behold that boon a burthen prove!
Behold your gen'rous aim destroy'd!
Change then to death your gift divine;
The gift that gladly I resign.

[*She reclines on the turf in a pensive attitude.*

SCENE VII.

LYCIDAS, SAPPHO, DORIS.

Lyc. Heard ye that pensive strain? it was the voice
Of Doris. See, reclin'd upon yon bed
Of fragrant violets she sits and weeps!
Hasten, I pray thee, and with some soft air
Chase from her breast the cloud of black despair.

[*Lycidas retires behind the Bower, while Sappho sits down at her feet, plays a pastoral symphony on her reed, and then sings.*

Sap. The youth that gazes on thy charms,
Rivals in bliss the gods on high,
Whose ear thy pleasing converse warms,
Thy lovely smile his eye.
But trembling awe my bosom heaves,
When plac'd those heav'nly charms among;
The sight my voice of power bereaves,
And chains my torpid tongue.

Thro' ev'ry thrilling fibre flies
The subtle flame; in dimness drear
My eyes are veil'd; a murm'ring noise
Glides tinkling thro' my ear;
Death's chilly dew my limbs o'erspreads,
Shiv'ring, convuls'd, I panting lye;
And pale, as is the flower that fades,
I droop, I faint, I die!*

Dor. Who art thou, bright-ey'd Spirit? for those strains
Bespeak thee more than human. Tell me, which
Of the tun'd spheres thou guid'st, and why hast left
The chiming orb to sooth my mortal ear
With thy celestial warblings?

SCENE VIII.

PHAON.

What do I see? a rival at her feet!
He clasps her hand, devours it with his kisses.
Rouse thee, rash Swain, and stand prepar'd to meet
An injur'd lover's fury.

[*Lycidas rushes from behind the Bower.*

Lyc. Stand there first,
And meet the fury of that injur'd lover
Who first has right of vengeance!

NOTE.

* This is meant to be a close translation of the Fragment in Longinus.

Pha. Him I've caught
In am'rous dalliance; he shall first be punish'd,
Thee I can scorn at leisure.

[*He runs at Sappho, strikes her on the breast, she falls.*

Dor. Stay thee, PHAON.
Ah me! the shepherd swoons. Good LYCIDAS
Prevent a deadlier blow.

[*Lycidas seizes the crook of Sappho, and stands before the Bower to guard it, while Doris kneels and supports her.*

Lyc. Base Murderer, pause!
In me behold a man, whose firmer arm
Is brac'd to meet thy prowess, vile Assassin,
I dare thee to the combat!

Pha. No, poor Shepherd,
Thy heart enough is wounded! Hie thee hence:
My wrath shall not assist the scorn of DORIS,
Curst with the pang of unsuccessful love.
Go bear away thy woes and quit the grove.

Where the willows skirt the brook,
Go and weave a garland green,
Leave thou there thy scrip and crook,
Vent in tears thy jealous spleen:
Heave thou there thy last sad sigh,
Drop into the stream and die.

Sap. Die didst thou say? I hop'd I had been dead;
But death, like PHAON, has deceiv'd poor SAPPHO.

Dor. and Lyc. SAPPHO!

Pha. Just Heav'ns! it is, it is my SAPPHO,
And I have wounded her perhaps to death!

Sap. Would to that Heav'n thou hadst! but thou may'st still
Atchieve the deed; behold this bruised breast!
O! with thy dagger give a kinder blow,
And I shall be at peace.

Pha. O torture! torture!
Where shall I turn? how hide me from myself?

SCENE IX.

AGENOR.

Whence springs this tumult? need I ask the cause,
When that licentious wretch appears before me?
But who the wounded swain?

Dor. Hear, Sire, and wonder,
'Tis Lesbian SAPPHO; she whose tuneful fame—

Sap. Ah! spare the praise, or turn that praise to pity.
Yes; pity her, whom fate ordain'd to prove
The sharpest pangs of agonizing love.
O! if thy aged heart can feel,
Ev'n from that venerable eye
My woes might bid the tears to steal,
And not debase its dignity. [*To Agenor.*

Ag. See, at thy call they freely flow!

Ag. Dor. Lyc. We all partake in SAPPHO's woe!

Pha. Shall I, that sorrow's impious cause,
Not add my true repentant tear?

Ag. Sap. Do. Lyc. Traytor, avaunt! the vengeance fear,
That on thy head thy falsehood draws!

Ag. Fly from his presence, hapless Fair:
Fly to my hospitable gate:

Dor. There let this breast thy friendship share;

Lyc. There let my zeal on both await.

Pha. Shall I be banish'd from the grove,
Deny'd my folly to atone?

Ag. Sap. Ph. Dor. Lyc. Such is the righteous doom of Jove!
So Justice thunders from his throne!

[*Exeunt—Phaon on the opposite side.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

A gloomy valley with caves and trees on one side; a fountain issuing from a rock and forming a stream on the other: the sea seen at the termination of the vale, and the moon setting in the horizon. Sappho in her female habit comes out of one of the caves unattended.

SAPPHO.

The radiant Queen of night retires,
And quits her silver car;
The Pleiads veil their lambent fires,
And ev'ry glittering star,
That flam'd on midnight's sable brow,
Have ceas'd to tremble, and to glow;
While, lost to PHAON, love, and joy,
I heave the solitary sigh:
Still pants my wakeful heart, still weeps my wearied eye.
[*She reclines on a bank.*

Ah! come ye balmy powers of sleep,
Nor from my arms, like PHAON, rove.
O! bid my eyes forget to weep!
Bid my fond heart forget to love.*

NOTE.

* This accompanied Recitative and Air is a kind of paraphrase of a little fragment of SAPPHO's, apud Hephestionem:

Δέδυκε μὲν ἀ σελάνα,
Καὶ Πλειάδες, μέσαι δὲ
Νύκτες, παρὰ δ' ἔρχεθ' ὤρα·
Ἐγὼ δὲ μόνα καθεύδω.

See the Edition of PINDAR and other Lyric Poems by H. STEPHENS.

SCENE II.

A soft symphony, during which Sappho falls asleep and the Naiad Arethusa rises from the stream, seated in a shell.

ARETHUSA.

See! from her translucent bed
Arethusa brings thee aid.
Lo! she sprinkles on thy breast
Vial'd drops, by fingers chaste
Cull'd from the cærulean deeps,
Where her coldest chrystal sleeps;
Where Alphéus dare not lave,
To mix with her's his amorous wave.
Thrice I lift my virgin hand,
Thrice I shed the vapors bland,
To calm thy soul; while I declare
The council I from Phœbus bear.
Know, by my voice, he bids his vot'ry fly
To where Leucate's cliff o'erhangs the main.
There shall she try
The last, the dangerous remedy
Of those, who love like her, and love in vain.

A voice divine proclaims thy cure:
Hear, SAPPHO, hear that voice divine
To Phœbus haste with off'rings pure,
And lay them on his holy shrine:
Then from Leucate's frowning brow
(Resolved to perish or be free)
Rush to the wave that rolls below
And welcome Death or Liberty.

[*Arethusa descends.*

SCENE III.

SAPPHO (*awaking.*)

What do I hear? I'll try the desperate leap.
Naiad, I thank thee. In thy friendly fount
I drop these tears of pious gratitude.
Yes, 'tis resolv'd; ev'n now I mount the rock.
Bold Fancy bears me to it's lofty summit;
Now hurls me headlong. Countless fathoms deep
I fall! the clear blue wave receives me. O how cold;
Yet grateful. Quickly will it quench the flame,
That thus consumes my heart. Phœbus, I come—
Ah! who arrests my step?

SCENE IV.

PHAON, SAPPHO.

Sap. Traitor to love;
To honour; to the gods! abjur'd of Heav'n,
Avoid my presence!

Pha. If repentant tears,
And sighs that rend the heart, from whence they spring,
Can plead forgiveness, SAPPHO, hear them plead.

Sap. Yes; so he look'd. The sable-fringed lids
Of his false eyes thus veil'd their liquid lustre,
With modest shamefac'dness, when first he woo'd me.
Look thus on DORIS, base one! SAPPHO towers
Above thy wiles. The god, the god inspires me!
He calls me to Leucate. Dread Apollo,
I hear, and I obey thy awful call.

Pha. Hah! to Leucate!

Sap. Yes, to that fam'd cliff,
Whence, dashing down into the whelming surge,
I'll die—or live to hate thee.

Pha. My heart's Idol,
Forego this frenzy!

Sap. Say that it were frenzy;
The wrongs, that thou hast heap'd on this poor brain,
Would justify the deed: but 'tis not frenzy;
'Tis inspiration. From yon stream it rose,
In a cærulean robe of Heav'n's own tincture.

Naiad! I saw thee rise; I heard thee speak:
Thou bad'st me fly to Liberty, or Death.

Pha. Fly rather to these arms, to life, to love!

Sap. Cruel! It was thy arm, that gave the blow,
Which makes life loathsome.

Pha. 'Twas the blow of error.

Sap. Away! I will not parley with thy falsehood.

Pha. Behold me kneel!

Sap. Repentance comes too late.
Rise, Traitor, rise! my choice is fixt as fate.

Pha. O! let this tender tear,
Contrition's purest dew,
My Sappho's pity move.

Sap. No! my intense despair
Here sighs a long adieu
To PHAON, and to Love
I go—

Pha. Yet hear—

Sap. I go
To steep Leucate's brow.
I fly from fraud and thee.

Pha. Yet stay—

Sap. Deceiver! no.
The rolling waves below
Involve my destiny.

Pha. Let Love his softest strains employ
To call thee back to him and joy.

Sap. In vain; we part to meet no more——
Pha. and Sap. What agony severe!
Fate has no sharper pang in store
The love-lorn breast to tear.
[*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE V.

Changes to the Temple of Hymen with the Priests of the god standing before the Altar.

AGENOR, DORIS, LYCIDAS.

Ag. Doris, tho' now the nuptial altar flames,
My blessing pauses.
Dor. Why, my gracious Father,
When my repentant soul with truth returns
To filial duty, and to faithful love?
Ag. Does Lycidas forgive thee?
Lyc. Trust me, Sire,
Like summer storms, her frowns, my fears are past,
And mutual love shines brighter from the blast.
When hail descends in pearly shower,
The linnet nestling in the shade,
Hides with its wing its drooping head,
Nor tunes the sprightly lay.
But soon the sun's enlivening power
Dispels the cold, that chill'd the plain;
And soon the linnet hastes again
To warble on it's spray.

Dor. Dear LYCIDAS! that jocund strain bespeaks
A heart completely cur'd of jealous fear;
Nor shall that baneful guest,
Wak'd by my falsehood, more invade thy breast.
When beauty, void of faith and truth,
Beguil'd my wand'ring eye,
This pensive heart, Ah! gentle Youth,
Could only heave and sigh.
It did not love, it but admir'd;
For love's allied to smiles and joy:
But now, by thy fair virtue fir'd,
It glows with extasy.

Ag. Enough! enough! now did the voice of fate
Call old AGENOR to the darkling tomb,
Where sleep his ancestors, trust me, my children,
The summons were right welcome. But he lives
To bless you both, and take from you the blessing,
Which dear observance of your mutual love,
Now sheds in streams of joy on his grey hair.
Haste, Holy Men, the sacrifice prepare.
Pour libations on the shrine;
Wake the pipe, the lute, the lyre;
Let the loudly-warbling choir
In harmonious chorus join.

Doris. }
Lycidas. } Call the god, that gives desire
Lawful right his joys to share.

Agenor. Bid him warm this willing pair
With his torch of purest fire.

Chorus. Holy Hymen, thou alone
Giv'st to faith and constancy
Fair fruition's lasting crown,
Years of unpolluted joy.

SCENE VI.

PHAON *enters to them.*

Ag. Ah, whence that step! what wretch disturbs our rites?

Lyc. Gods! does the Lesbian traitor dare insult
Chaste Hymen with his presence?

Ag. Hence! far hence,
Thou most profane of that inconstant tribe,
Whom Hymen holds accurst.

Dor. Hence, on thy life,
And dread the god's just vengeance.

Pha. Well I know,
I merit all his vengeance; death befits
The wretch, who murder'd SAPPHO.

Dor. SAPPHO murder'd?

Lyc. And by thy impious hand?

Pha. My hand is guiltless;
Nor is she dead. But know, she flies to Death,
And finds him at Leucate.

Ag. Dread resolve!

Lyc. Learn, DORIS, learn to what dire deeds despair
Can drive a slighted lover.

Ag. Was this act
Her own, or did some Deity inspire it?

Pha. She talk'd of visions from Apollo sent,
Of some strange Naiad, who proclaim'd his mandate;
Yet sure 'twas frenzy all, and caus'd by me:
I therefore murder'd SAPPHO.

Lyc. Sure thou didst.
Think, what a victim to thy falsehood falls!

Ag. She was the very soul of Poesy;
Form'd by Apollo's self: her tuneful frame
Was the rich lyre, whence all his rapture flow'd.

Dor. Nor more attun'd to Poesy, than Love:
Each note she breath'd was melting, as the voice
Of Venus when she wept Adonis dead.

Pha. And had I died before her; died while faithful,
Her lays had crown'd me with that shepherd's fame.

Ag. Go then, disloyal youth, and mourn thy baseness;
Away to chearless solitude.

Pha. I mean it.

Dor. Bear not to other nymphs thy soft deceits,
Thy winning gestures, thy delusive smiles.

Lyc. Nor hope, as here thou didst, to part two hearts,
Which virtue first united.

Ag. Learn, that beauty,
Were it as bright as gilds Hyperion's cheek,
Save when its bloom inshrines a virtuous heart,
Is only splendid misery.

Pha. This, and more

I patiently can bear. Mix with reproof
Your sharpest taunts, I'll yet endure them all;
For I deserve them all. Yes, to some cave,
Which never chearing sun-beam pierc'd, I'll fly:
There live forlorn; there unlamented die.
Hail, horrors, hail! I come, I come!
Ye caves, o'erhung with savage thorn,
Receive me to your haunts forlorn,
A sad, a silent guest;
Fling round my head your darkest gloom,
And hide me in that living tomb,
Where anguish exiles rest. [*Exit Phaon.*

Ag. Behold his fate, and tremble, ye that dare
To break those chaste and sanctimonious vows,
This deity approves. But see, what light
Sudden and dazzling sparkles from his symbol!
Behold! it moves; it shakes its saffron robe;
In gentle guise it waves its lambent torch;
It speaks.

[*The Statue of Hymen during this speech appears animated by degrees, and then utters the following words in accompanying Recitative.*

Mortals! to you 'tis given to view,
In bright ideal portraiture, the scene
Now passing at Leucate; mark it well,
And stamp the awful moral on your souls.

SCENE VII.

The Priests of Hymen hasten from the Altar and join the other personages on the front of the Stage; the Temple, Statue, &c. vanish instantly under a change of scene, which represents the Promontory of Leucate. The portico of a magnificent Temple dedicated to Apollo is seen in perspective on one side; out of which the Priests of the god come in solemn procession, followed by Sappho and her attendants: a slow pathetic march is played during the time. Two Orchestras are supposed to be necessary in the final Chorus, and one behind the scene at first.

SAPPHO.

Here pause awhile! be mute,
Ye warblers, that inspire the Dorian flute,
While SAPPHO, once the fav'rite of the Nine,
Nay, if fame bids her not too high aspire,
Their tuneful sister, to the radiant shrine
Of this her patron god, perchance her sire,
Devotes this instrument divine.

[*She hangs her Lyre on one of the Pillars.*

Lo! on this column's Parian height
I hang the glittering freight:
And hear, ye Priests, with reverence hear
This verse inscriptive, by my voice decreed
Memorial of my dying deed.
" To Him, that did inspire,
" SAPPHO to Phœbus consecrates her lyre.

" What suits with SAPPHO, Phœbus, suits with thee;
" The gift, the giver, and the god agree."*
This off'ring made, my faithful virgin train,
Take ye my last adieu, and from my fate
Learn to distrust false man, if not to hate.

[*She ascends the Rock.*

Tremendous Rock! I mount thee now;
And now I reach thy dreadful brow.
O giddy brain support the sight!
See, how the surge, as black as night,
Rolls horribly below!
It rolls—sad solace to despair,
Its awful murmurs strike my ear.
I faint—I tremble—Powers on high,
Ah! hasten from your sky:
Catch from perdition this devoted head.
Does Zephyr sleep? will Cupid bring
No soft, no tutelary wing
To waft me to my wat'ry bed?
Hear, god of Love, 'tis SAPPHO calls!
Dread deity! 'tis SAPPHO falls.

[*She throws herself from the rock; a clap of thunder is heard, and a swan is seen rising from the sea, and ascending to the clouds.*

NOTE.

* This inscription is borrowed from Mr. POPE's Translation of Ovid's Epistle on the subject. His version was too perfect to admit any attempt at another.

Concluding Chorus with both Orchestras.

PRIESTS OF APOLLO, HYMEN, AGENOR, &c.

Great Jove himself arrests her fate!
Hail, prodigy divine!
She soars a swan in plumy state;
To Jove she soars, to claim
In heav'n a residence divine,
On earth immortal fame.

END OF THE OPERA.

PIGMALION,

A

LYRICAL SCENE,

TRANSLATED INTO THEATRICAL VERSE FROM THE FRENCH PROSE

OF

J. J. ROUSSEAU OF GENEVA.

PIGMALION,*

A LYRICAL SCENE.

The Theatre represents a Statuary's working-room. On one side appear blocks of marble, and unfinished groups and statues. In the centre of the scene, another statue concealed under a pavilion of light transparent silk, ornamented with festoons and fringe. Pigmalion is discovered leaning on his elbow, in a pensive, contemplative, yet unsettled posture. Soon after he rises hastily, takes his tools from the table, and begins to give, at certain intervals, a few strokes of the chissel on one of his unfinished statues. Then steps backward to review his work, with a look of discontent and disappointment.

PIGMALION.

It will not be. No gleam of life, or soul,
Dawns at my stroke. 'Tis still a breathless stone.
Away with art like this! it is not art,
'Tis mere abortive labour. (M)† Ah my Genius!
Where art thou fled? My fancy where retir'd?
And why, Imagination! dost thou feel
This frost of dullness chilling all thy fires?
The marble feels thee not, it quits my hand
Cold as it left its quarry. Where, Pigmalion,

* Now first published.

† The mark (M) signifies the part, in which a musical Ritornello was introduced, when the piece was performed at Lyons.

Where is thy power which once could rival Jove's,
Creating gods. 'Tis gone: the veriest wretch
That toils for vulgar gain is now thy equal.
Hence, ye vile instruments! my glory once,
But now my shame, dishonour not my hands. (M.)

[*He throws away his tools with disdain, and walks about meditating with his arms folded over his breast.*

Whence comes this change, this new unheard of change,
This atrophy of soul.—Imperial Tyre!
Thou richest, proudest theatre of taste,
In vain display'st thou to my sickly sense,
The grace that sparkles on thy sculptur'd walls;
I cannot taste thy glories, Queen of Asia!
Thy artists, thy philosophers, thy painters,
Thy bards, the heralds of posterity,
Who antedate the praises she shall pay
To each true heir of fame, they touch not me;
Ev'n friendship's self has lost its power to charm. (M)
Ev'n you, ye young, ye lovely; ye sweet proofs
Of all that Nature, in her happiest hour,
Could e'er attain of perfect, and of fair;
Ev'n you, ye blooming models of my art,
Who crown'd my toil with rapture, who inspir'd
My soul at once with genius, and with love,
Yes, since that art has far surpast your charms,
Ev'n you are grown indifferent to my sight. (M)

[*He sits down and contemplates the objects around him.*

Wretch that I am! chain'd, as by magic spell,
To this peculiar spot, listless I sit,
Unable or to work, or to retire.
Wand'ring from group to group, from form to form,
My feeble chissel seems to scorn the power
Of its fallacious guide, and each rude feature,
(Rude as when first design'd) heeds not the hand
Which once could bid it breathe—
[*Rising with impetuosity.*
'Tis done, 'tis past;
My genius is expir'd; young as I am,
I have outliv'd my art. (M)—But is it thus?
Why then these inward ardours that consume me?
And why this secret something in my breast
That wraps me from myself? Are these the signs,
The languid signs, of an exhausted fancy?
Feel we, in that dull state, these warm emotions?
This flush of passions? this impetuous burst
Of fierce desires? this strange inquietude
That agitates, torments, distracts the soul?
What is the cause? alas! I vainly thought
The miracle of grace I lately form'd
Made my fond eye a truant to my art,
And therefore did I veil it from my sight.
Yes, though 'twas profanation, these rash hands
Have dar'd to hide the trophy of their fame.
'Tis hid, and what's my gain? more pensiveness,
Not more attention. O immortal work!

Well may'st thou be thus dear, thus precious to me;
For when my genius fails, when age and ills
Take from me all the plastic powers I boast,
When now no more of beauteous and sublime
Lives in my labours; then, my GALATEA!
Then will I show thee to a wond'ring world,
And tell that world PIGMALION made thee thus.
Yes, when I've lost my all, thou shalt remain,
And I shall be consol'd. (M)

[*He comes nearer the pavilion, then retires, approaches again, retreats, and stops at intervals to gaze upon it, sighing.*

But why conceal her?
Inactive, dull, desponding as I sit,
Why rob myself of that peculiar bliss
The sight of her inspires? she is my art's
Dear masterpiece; and yet, perhaps, remains
Some slight defect that has escap'd my eye,
Perhaps I still may to her vestment add
Some fold more graceful; 'twere a crime to spare
One possible addition that might deck
A form so lovely. Haply too the sight
Will call to life again the slumb'ring powers
Of my invention; better lift the veil,
Better review my work—review my work!
Alas! till now I only have admir'd it. (M)

[*He attempts to undraw the Curtain, and lets it fall again as affrighted.*

Unspeakable emotion! how the touch
Of this slight veil affects me. How I tremble!
Surely my rash and sacrilegious hand
Invades the shrine of some divinity.
Fool! 'tis a stone, and thou its sculptor. True—
But what of that? are not our temples crowded
By gods that claim the worship of the people
On no superior charter? (M)

[*He undraws the Curtain trembling, prostrates himself before the statue of Galatea, which appears placed on a very small pedestal, and that raised on a flight of marble steps, ranged semicircularly.*

Take, GALATEA! take thy maker's homage;
I was deceiv'd, I carv'd thee for a nymph,
But O thou art a goddess. Venus self
Is less divinely fair.—What vanity,
What childish weakness this! 'tis my own work,
Yet madly I admire it. Vile self-love,
These are thy goodly triumphs. Mock'd by thee,
I worship in the image I have made
My worthless self. Yet surely truth must own
Nothing, no nothing e'er appear'd in nature
Ev'n half so lovely; I have here surpast
The workmanship of Heav'n—and could it be,
Could these same hands form such transcendant beauty?
These hands that touch'd—this mouth that—Hold,
PIGMALION,
I spy a fault. This drapery spreads too far,

It hides too much, let me relieve the fold,
The charms that it conceals should be display'd. (M)

[*He takes his mallet and chissel and advancing slowly mounts with hesitation the steps before the statue, as if he seemed hardly to dare touch it, at last raising his chissel and preparing to strike, he stops, and cries out—*

Heav'ns! what a tremulous convulsion shakes me;
My quivering nerves attempt in vain to guide
Th' uncertain tool. I cannot, dare not strike,
I shall do harm, incorrigible harm. (M)

[*He summons resolution, and raising his chissel gives a stroke, then seized with fear lets it fall.*

Gods! if the heaving, the elastic flesh
Does not resist my chissel!

[*He descends the steps trembling and confused.*

Idle fear!
Absurdest terror!—No! I will not touch her,
The gods inspire this panic; she is theirs,
Already theirs, an inmate of their heaven. (M)

[*He re-examines the figure.*

What would'st thou change, PIGMALION, what correct,
What novel charm supply? She is already
Perfection's self; perfection is her fault,
Her only fault. Yes, heav'nly GALATEA!
Wert thou less perfect, nothing would'st thou want—(M)

[*Tenderly.*

But yet thou want'st a soul; all, all save that,
Thou hast in rich profusion. (M)

[*With still greater tenderness.*

Yet, if Heaven
Inspir'd that body with a kindred soul,
How very lovely ought that soul to be. (M)

[*He pauses for some time, then returning to his seat, he proceeds in a slow and different tone.*

What are the wild desires I dare to form?
Whither does passion drive me? righteous Heav'n!
Th' illusive veil that hid me from myself
Falls off. Yet let me not behold my heart,
I fear me it contains what, once beheld,
Would make me hate it. (M)

[*A long pause in deep disorder.*

'Twill not be conceal'd.
Tell then thyself, tell to a mocking world
The passion that distracts PIGMALION'S soul
Has there its lifeless object. Own the cause,
The worthy cause that keeps thee idle here;
That block, that marble mass, hard, and unform'd,
Till with this iron—Idiot that thou art,
Sink, sink into thyself, groan o'er thy error,
Behold at once thy folly, and bewail it.

[*Starting up with impetuosity.*

But 'tis not folly, I abjure the word,
My senses still remain; there is no cause
For self-reproach. This cold, this breathless marble

Is not the thing I love. No, 'tis a being
That lives, that thinks, can love, and be belov'd,
Alike to this in feature, not in frame;
'Tis her that I adore; and wheresoe'er
I find the charming fair one, wheresoe'er
She dwells, whate'er her birth, or habitation,
She still shall be the idol of my heart.
My folly then (if folly be its name)
Springs from a quick perceptive sense of beauty,
My crime (if I indeed am culpable) proceeds
From too much sensibility of soul;
—Such crimes, such follies ne'er shall make me blush. (M)

[*Less fervently, yet still with emotion.*

Heav'ns! round that form what lambent radiance flings
Its darts of fire, they reach, they pierce my soul,
And seem to bear me back into their source—
Meanwhile, alas! all cold and motionless
She stands.—While I, while my tumultuous spirits,
Bursting their bounds, would quit their vital seat
To warm her breathless bosom. Extacy
Gives the transferring power of life and soul,
And I will use it; thou shalt die, PIGMALION,
(Delicious death!) to live in GALATEA.
What have I said? Just Heav'ns! to live in her,
Then must I cease to view, must cease to love her,
No, Fate forbid! Let GALATEA live,
Yet let my love live too; for to be hers
I still must be myself; and, being that,

I must be ever hers; must ever love her,
And ever be belov'd. (M) [*In a tone of transport.*
Belov'd, distraction!
It cannot be, O torment, rage, despair,
O hopeless, horrible, distracting passion!
The pains of hell rack my desponding soul.
Beings of power! Beings of mercy hear me!
Hear me, ye gods! before whose awful shrines
The people kneel because ye know their frailty;
Yes, ye have oft for vainer purposes
Lavish'd your miracles; look then with pity
On this fair form, look on this tortur'd breast,
Be just to both, and merit our oblations. (M)
[*With a more pathetic degree of enthusiasm.*
And thou, sublimest Essence! hear the prayer;
Who, hid from outward sense, on the mind's eye
Pour'st thy refulgent evidence. O hear me
Parent of Worlds! Soul of the Universe!
Thou, at whose voice, the plastic power of Love
Gives to the elements their harmony,
To matter life, to body sentiment,
To all the tribes of being, place, and form.
Hear me, thou sacred, pure, cœlestial fire!
Thou all-producing, all-preserving power,
Venus Urania hear me! where is now
Thy all-adjusting poize, thy force expansive,
Where is dread Nature's universal law
In my sensations? What a void is here!

Ah tell me why thy vivifying warmth
Fills not that void, and bids my wishes live?
Thy fires are all concenter'd in this breast,
While, on yon form, the icy hand of Death
Keeps its chill hold. Pigmalion perishes
By that excess of life yon marble wants.
Goddess, I do not ask a miracle,
See, she exists, she ought to be annull'd,
Fair Order is disturb'd, all Nature outrag'd;
O vindicate her rights; resume again
Thy course beneficent, and shed thy blessings
In just equality. Yes, Venus, yes,
Two beings here are wanting to complete
The plenitude of things; divide to each
Its share of that fierce fire which scorches one,
And leaves the other lifeless. Well thou know'st
'Twas thou that form'd by my deputed hand
Those charms, those features; all they want is life
And soul—my goddess, give her half of mine,
Give her the whole, and let me live in her,
Such life will well suffice. O as thou lovest
Our mortal homage hear me! they alone,
Whom life gives consciousness of Heav'n, and thee,
Can pay thee that due homage; let thy works
Extend thy glory. Queen of Beauty, hear me!
Nor let this model of perfection stand
An image vain of unexisting grace. (M)

[*He returns to himself by degrees with an expression of assurance and joy.*

Reason returns. What unexpected calm,
What fortitude unhop'd for arms my breast!
The balm of peace and confidence has cool'd
My boiling blood. I feel as born anew.
Thus is it still with heav'n-dependent man,
The very trust and feel of that dependence
Consoles his grief. How heavily soe'er
Misfortune flings her load upon his shoulder,
Let him but pray to Heav'n, that load is lighten'd.
Yet, when to Heav'n we lift a foolish prayer,
Our confidence is vain, and we deceiv'd.
Alas! alas! in such a state as mine
We pray to all, and nothing hears our prayer;
The very hope that chears us is more vain
Than the desire that rais'd it. O shame, shame
On such extravagance. I dare no longer
Reflect upon its cause, and yet, whene'er
I cast my eye upon yon fatal object,
Fresh palpitations, new disquiets choak me,
A secret fear restrains— [*In a tone of cruel irony.*
Poor wretch! be bold,
Take confidence. Yes, court, and win a statue. (M)
[*He perceives it to begin to be animated, and starts back seiz'd with affright and with a heart filled with sorrow.*
What do I see? what did I think I saw?
Ye gods, her cheek has bloom, her eye has fire!
Nay, but she moves. O, was it not enough

To hope a prodigy; to crown my wretchedness
Lo, I have seen it. (M) [*In excess of desperation.*
Hapless wretch! 'tis done;
Thy madness is confirm'd; reason has left thee
As well as genius. Let its loss console thee;
It covers thy disgrace. (M)
[*With a lively indignation.*
'Tis as it should be,
Happy indeed for him that lov'd a stone
To turn a moon-struck madman. (M)
[*He turns and sees the statue move, and descend the steps on which she had been placed on the foot of the pedestal. He throws himself on his knees, and lifts his hands and eyes to heaven.*
Holy Heav'n!
Immortal gods! O Venus! Galatea
O fascination of outrageous Love!
GALATEA. [*She touches herself and says*]
Myself!
PIGMALION. [*transported.*]
Myself!
GALATEA. [*touching herself again.*]
It is myself.
PIGMALION.
O blest,
O exquisite delusion! it affects
My very ears. Ah, never more abandon
My raptur'd senses.

GALATEA. [*stepping aside and touching one of the marbles.*]

This is not myself.

[*Pigmalion in an agitation and transport unable almost to contain himself, follows all her motions, listens, observes her with an eager attention which almost takes away his breath.*

[*Galatea comes to him again, and gazes on him, he opens his arms and beholds her with extacy. She rests her hand upon him, he trembles, seizes her hand, puts it to his heart, and then devours it with kisses.*

Ah! 'tis myself again! [*With a sigh.*

PIGMALION.

Yes, loveliest, best,
And worthiest masterpiece of these blest hands,
Dear offspring of my heart, and of the gods,
It is thyself; it is thyself alone;
I gave thee all my being, and will live,
My GALATEA, only to be thine. [*The curtain falls.*

END OF VOL. II.

London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co.
Cleveland-Row, St. James's.